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Old Hayseed Among Bunco Men; or, Sol Sharpe, Detective.



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THEN OLD HAYSEED WADDLED ON, FOLLOWED BY A JEERING BEVY OF BOYS.

Old Hayseed Among Bunco Men;

OR,

SOL SHARPE, DETECTIVE.

A Metropolitan Romance.

BY EDWARD LYTTON WHEELER.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE.

SOLOMON SHARPE, American-born, twenty-three years of age, of good form and great physical strength, and a naturally good-looking, smooth-shaven face, lit up by a brilliant pair of dark-brown eyes—Solomon Sharpe, a metropolitan detective of more than ordinary ability, sat in his McDougal street office, in an evidently unpleasant frame of mind, for his brows were contracted as he sat gazing out of the window, and ran his fingers through his curly brown hair in a nervous sort of way, that bespoke mental disquiet.

His "office" was the third story front room of one of the Macdougal street tenements, and the furniture consisted only of a bed, a couple of chairs, a washstand and stove;—this much, and nothing more, except for the shabby, time-worn ingrain carpet upon the floor.

The day was a cool one in November, and a fire was much needed in the detective's room, but there was not a spark of fire in the rusty stove, and, evidently, there had not been for many a day.

Solomon sat by the window, his elbow upon the sill and chin resting in the palm of his hand, looking thoroughly discouraged and disgusted with the world at large.

Out-of-doors a raw, piercing wind was blowing through the narrow street; and, to make matters more disagreeable, a steady, drenching rain was falling—one of those all-day, gloomy rains, peculiarly New York rains that are so sure to give a person of the most cheerful nature a touch of the "blues."

The character of the weather, together with young Sharpe's other troubles, served to affect him with a fit of the bluest kind of blues, which drove him nearly to desperation.

Upon the other chair, which stood just in front of the very plainly clad detective, were two silver dollars and an open letter penned in a graceful hand, which in a measure accounted for Mr. Sharpe's apparent downheartedness.

This letter ran as follows:

"NEW YORK, November 20th.

"MR. SOLOMON SHARPE:—

"SIR:—By receipt of this you will understand that your services or presence, at our place of business, will not be further required, and we send you, by bearer, the balance of salary due you.

"When you applied for situation of entry clerk, in response to our advertisement, our junior member was rather impressed with your honest appearance, and gave you the job. We have since learned that, previous to applying to us for employment, you had achieved some notoriety as a private detective. As we thoroughly distrust so-called private detectives, our reasons for discharging you are obvious, coupled with which is the fact that you have presumed to address the daughter of the senior member of the firm. Familiarly, and asked her to accompany you to the theater.

"This is too much. To succeed, you should stick closer to your station in life.

"AARON AGATHA & Co."

It was the tone of this letter, and the fact that the two dollars on the chair before him was the total of his worldly cash capital which had caused Sol Sharpe to feel decidedly glum; for, ordinarily, he was of a bright and cheerful disposition and as genial a companion as one could wish to have.

Now, however, the world looked cold and heartless to him, for, although born and bred one of the poor young men of the metropolis, he had, naturally, had his numerous ups and downs before to-day.

It was true he had put in a couple of years at private detective work, but, although he had evinced marked tact for the business and won several cases remarkable for the shrewdness that secured success, he had found it nip and tuck to eke out more than a meager livelihood.

New York, it may be safely said, has more police and private detectives than it has employment for, and so Sol Sharpe had discovered. He had also found that the police detectives, backed by political influence, usually got the credit of the "pie," while the privates had to be content with the pie alone and, often, "cheap grub pie" at that.

So, a couple of weeks before our story, seeing an advertisement in the *World* for an entry clerk, he had answered and, considerably to his surprise, had obtained the situation.

The firm of Agatha & Co., commission merchants, did a large business, and young Sharpe had been kept busy during hours of business, and endeavored to give entire satisfaction, although the wages were very meager indeed.

He had supposed he was doing right, until on this cold, bleak morning a messenger had brought him the letter and two dollars.

Then his surprise knew no bounds.

Agnes Agatha, the senior member's daughter, he had seen but on one occasion, and then he had not had anything like the audacity even to address her.

And, what was more perplexing to him, was the fact that the two dollars inclosed was but one fifth of what was due him!

"I can't understand it," he mused, as he sat staring out of the window. "How they came to discover that I had been in the detective line; but, perhaps, that was easy enough. Some of their customers, no doubt, recognized me, and volunteered the information. But, who told 'em that lie about my attempting familiarity with Miss Agatha, and asking her to accompany me to the theater? That's what sticks me more than anything else, unless it's why the balance of my salary was not sent."

He recalled, one by one, the other employees of the firm, but could not remember one whom he thought would be mean enough to backcap him or could have any reason for doing so.

"Well, the letter's right to the point," he said, finally, "and I suppose there's no use of demanding any more explanation or any more salary, for that matter. The blazes only knows where the next money is to come from, after these two dollars are gone. Heigh-ho! I suppose I'll have to start out in the wet and see if I can't find something to do."

At this juncture there was a rap on the door, which was almost immediately afterward opened, and a girl, some fifteen or sixteen years of age, entered.

She was of medium height for that age and apparently quite strong, but was very poorly clad in a patched skirt, a Jersey, out at the elbows, and a hood, while on her feet was a coarse pair of shoes run over at the heel.

Her face, however, was clean, round and rosy, and lit up by a pair of dancing eyes that only rivaled in their dark color the bangs that protruded from under the front edge of her hood.

Under one arm she carried a bundle of the morning dailies, thus proclaiming that she was one of Gotham's innumerable news-venders.

"Hillo, Sharpy!" she saluted, as she entered the detective's room. "What's the kick-up with you? I didn't see ye at the store, an' so I thought mebber you'd took sick, or bi'n bit by a mad dog, an' I concluded I'd come up and investigate. Why, yer look as glum as a ten-cent beefsteak."

"And feel a blamed sight glummer!" Sharpe declared. "I've got the bounce!"

"Eh? Ye don't say so! What fer?"

"There's the only explanation I received, Molly," and the detective nodded toward the chair. "Guess I shall have to go back to the old biz again, if there's any show."

Molly picked up the letter and read it through.

"Well, by gum, that's mean!" she declared, candidly. "I never *did* like old Agatha. I had to buzz him two weeks, 'til I wore out his patience, before he paid me a paper bill he owed me. Mashin' his gal, hey?"

"By no means. Never saw her but once, and then I only gave her a passing glance."

"Humph! Guess old Agatha don't like detectives much?"

"No, it wouldn't seem so. Let the old crank go to blazes. I'll ask no odds of him."

"Neither would I. With them wits o' yourn you'll not starve. That the size o' your pile?" with a glance toward the two silver dollars.

"Every cent of it!" Sharpe replied.

"Phew! That ain't much. If you want a lift, call on Merry Moll!"

"Why, you talk as though you were well-heeled!" and Sol Sharpe smiled vaguely.

"Well, I should presume I could show up a tenner!" Molly retorted, with a toss of her pretty head. "What d'ye take me fer—a organ-grinder's monkey, or a Union Squar' barnstormin' actress?"

"Well, you've got plenty of cheek for either," Sol replied, as she flitted a crisp new ten-dollar note before his eyes. "Where did you make the raise?"

"I'll tell you," and Molly looked pleased that confidence was solicited. "I've bin sellin' papers for a good six years, an' I have got onto a o' little ropes, w'ot the others don't work. Well, when a steamer comes over from England, she 'most allus fetches over some high-cockolorum Englisher, w'ot comes over here to air his bigness, an' let on be's purty near as big an 'un as ther Prince o' Whales. Well, I makes et a point to time them steamers, an' i spruce up a little 'bove ordinary, takes my papers, an' goes down to where the passengers get off, an' makes myself heard."

"Some o' the boys are onto my racket, but I don't care for them, as long as none of the girls come nosin' around. I never teches the Americans, w'ot aire returnin' home, but I jest picks out the foreigners, puts on my purtiest smile, buttonholes 'em, an' asks 'em to please buy a paper."

"I get all sorts o' price, English money, an' then I goes down to Baxter street, an' works et off for grub. Them English dudes w'ot come over, with a gal hangin' onto their arm, they never asks for any change—that would be too common, you know."

"Well, yesterday one o' the Cunard lines landed its passengers, an' 'mong the passengers was a gallus-looking Englisher, in a gay uniform, gold eye-glasses, an' side-whiskers. I see he had never bin over before, an' I waltzed up to him, an' told him old Vic was dangerously sick. Ye orter see'd that feller git excited. He pulled out his ten, 'Merican money, tuk the paper I give him, jumped inter a cab, an' the way he went!"

"Why, Molly, you told a deliberate falsehood!"

"Nixee! Patsy MacAnnany told me that some Irish paper had given the queen a dose that made her awful sick. Dunno but what it was a stretcher, but I got the ten, an' he didn't ax for no change. I've got my eye on a seal-skin sacque, down in Prince street, an' ef I can raise the boodle by Christmas, I'm goin' to have it."

"You'd cut a great swell in a sealskin, Molly!" the detective observed, dryly.

"Guess I would! Fine feathers does a heap toward makin' fine birds. Oh! say, by the way—I found the funniest thing up at Third avenue and Forty-eighth street, this morning, and I want to show it to you, an' see what you make out of it."

The voluble newsgirl then deposited her papers, and proceeded to go through the pockets of her dress.

"Hope I ain't lost it," she said, "for you may make a job out of it. Ah! here it is!"

She produced a slip of paper that evidently had originally been the fly-leaf of a book, and handed it to Sol Sharpe, who took it rather carelessly, presuming that it was of but little consequence.

As he glanced over what was penciled upon the paper, his interest quickened perceptibly.

This was what the startled detective read:

"For God's sake, whoever finds this come to my rescue, I beg and pray you. I have been the inmate of Doctor La-car's private mad-house for more than four years—detained here against my will, when I am no more insane than you who find this. This is the first time I've had a chance to communicate with the outside world. I cannot tell what section of the city I am confined in, for I was brought here by a stranger. It may not be far from where this note is found. I can hear a clock strike from my room, and church-bells toll, but can only see the sky. Oh! be merciful and come to my rescue."

"RUTH RA—"

The latter part of the name was missing.

A horse had evidently stepped upon a corner of the paper and detached it, for the back of the scrap bore muddy marks.

The strange message had no date. It might have been blowing about the city for weeks.

But, no matter about this: here evidently was a clew to a foul plot.

At least Sol Sharpe appeared to think so, for, after reading it over several times, he carefully folded it, and stored it away in his pocket.

He then turned to Merry Moll, as she was usually named.

"You say you found this at Third avenue and Forty-eighth street?" he queried.

"Yes."

"When?"

"At daylight, when I was coming down after my papers."

"Where was the paper lying?"

"In the middle of Third avenue, on the Forty-eighth street crossin'."

"How came you to pick it up?"

"Give that up. I see it layin' ther'."

picked it up out o' curiosity, I s'pose. A r I picked it up I read it, an' et was so queer that I tho't I'd fetch it to you. I went down to the store, but found you wasn't there, an' so I run up here, to see what was ailin' you."

"Let me see—you live on East Forty-eighth street, don't you?"

"No. The old man's moved up to Fiftieth, an' tuk cheaper rooms. He hadn't enough to spend for rum, when he had to pay the other rent."

"Drinks as bad as ever, eh?"

"Worse. He ain't workin' now, and spends his time down in the slums. Dunno how he does it, but he rakes up enough money so as to come home paralyzed drunk."

"Does he demand your money?"

"Not any more. He tried to make me fork over, the other night, but I've been takin' lessons of Mary Ann Kerrigan, an' am gettin' scienced, and I give the old man a couple o' belts with a stove-raiser that satisfied him he'd better let me alone."

Sol laughed.

He had known Molly Marble since she had first appeared upon the streets of New York as a newsgirl—a little toddler, then not over five years old, scarcely big enough to carry her papers.

He had watched her grow up toward maturity with a keen interest; knew she often had a hard row to hoe; but, as she was a good-hearted, straightforward girl, he had often lent her a helping hand.

And now she was getting old enough, and big enough, to look out for herself, and although self-educated, literally in the gutters of the great city, was both purer and better than many people living in grand houses.

"Do you know of any churches, up that way, that have a striking steeple clock?" Sol asked.

"Yes, there's several scattered around, but none just at Forty-eighth street. You'd better go up and size things for yourself."

"I will, perhaps," Sol replied, thoughtfully. "I've got to go over to Broadway, anyhow, and I may as well walk up-town, and thus pass away this gloomy day."

Molly approved, and took her departure.

Sol Sharpe soon after followed her example.

"There may be nothing in this case for me," he mused, as he set out toward Broadway, "and again, there may be much. Anyhow, time is idle on my hands, with no prospect of striking a job such a day as this, and I'll give the matter my attention. These cases of people being shut up in so-called 'private asylums' are getting entirely too frequent, and need ventilation, and it would be quite a feather in my cap if I could expose a few of these vile and cruel prison-pens."

CHAPTER II.

THE BUNCO-STEERERS.

THUS communing, Sol soon reached Broadway and turned up that crowded thoroughfare toward Union Square.

Although his mind was busied in thinking over the strange message which had fallen into his hands he was on the alert for the clever pick-pockets who ever travel Broadway and other crowded thoroughfares engaged in their nefarious work.

Although he knew and was but lately known to a large number of these light-fingered nuisances, he felt now that he was likely to escape general recognition, as, when he had gone to work for Agatha and Company, he had shaved off his graceful mustache, which had quite altered his appearance.

Thus sauntering and watching, he spied a well-known character standing in a doorway across the street engaged in scanning the crowd that surged past.

"That's Bunco Jim, sure's I live!" Sol mused, and he stepped out to the edge of the curb and paused. "Yes; it is Jim Mullen, the most successful bunco-steerer in New York. Let me see: six months ago he was sent up—six months to-day, and he must have just got out, unless they shortened his sentence for good behavior, which is likely, as he wears a new suit of clothes and appears as fresh as a daisy."

"And here he is, out for new game, or my name is not Sol Sharpe. I wonder where his pal is—for these bunco-men never travel singly? I think I'll tarry a bit, and see what Mullen catches."

Mullen did not look like a typical crook. Indeed, most persons would have taken him for a well-to-do business man.

He was six foot tall, broad-shouldered, and finely-proportioned. He was dressed in a good

street-suit, that gave him a genteel appearance.

While appearing to be waiting for a chance to cross Broadway Sol Sharpe kept his eye on the steerer, and also endeavored to determine if he had a pal in the neighborhood.

The detective noticed a richly-attired young lady coming down Broadway on the east side, where, at the time, there chanced to be the least crowd of pedestrians.

He immediately recognized Agnes Agatha, a tall, stately girl, fairly good-looking, yet with a babyish sort of face and blonde hair.

When she reached the doorway where Bunco Jim was standing he appeared to speak to her. Much to the astonishment of Sol, she paused; then they shook hands with apparent cordiality, and entered into conversation, she standing in the doorway beside him.

"Well, I hope I may fall into a sewer, if that don't take my time!" was the detective's mental ejaculation. "Who would ever expect to see old Aaron Agatha's aristocratic daughter shaking hands and conversing with Bunco Jim, the escaped jailbird? For that is Bunco Jim. There's not the shadow of a doubt of it, in my mind, not one. He don't know me, but I know him. Great Scott! how I'd like to have old Agatha come along now and witness his pet talking with a man only recently off the Island! I'll bet he'd faint, or else kick the bucket with apoplectic rage."

Sol's astonishment was really genuine; he did not know what to make of the scene across the way.

Miss Agatha extended the chat for fully five minutes, and then hurried on down the street.

Bunco Jim bowed and lifted his hat as politely as a Chester as she departed.

"Well! well! well!" was all Sol could say to himself.

But great as was his surprise, he did not relax his vigilance in the least.

He felt sure the bunco man was laying for a victim, and meant to see who the victim was, if he secured any at all.

For fear he might attract too much attention, Sol concluded to walk up Broadway to the corner—which he did, and there crossed over to the side on which Mullen was positioned.

Just as he did so two men met near the corner—one a well-dressed, dandified-appearing fellow, who was bound up-town—the other a fat, short old man, with big stomach, florid face and silvery locks—a man fresh from the rural districts, evidently, judging by the coarse material of his garments, particularly his heavy gray overcoat, by his broad-rimmed felt hat and the heavy boots he wore.

The two men nearly collided, and the younger man said, "Excuse me;" then giving the older party a second glance, his face became covered with smiles as he thrust forth his hand.

"Why, really!" he exclaimed, "can it be possible? Mr. Pratt, from Canajoharie, as I live!"

The farmer raised his spectacles half an inch higher on the bridge of his nose, and stared at the young man in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Waal, I guess you've made a leetle mistake for once, young man!" he replied.

"What! are you really not Reuben Pratt?" ejaculated the bunco man. "It don't seem possible to me I can have made a mistake."

"But you have, though. My name is Josiah Ramsey, an' I'm from Little Valley, up in Cattaraugus county. An' I have got ther best farm an' stock fer miles 'round me."

"Indeed! indeed! Well, really, I hope you'll excuse me. I certainly took you for a friend of mine from Canajoharie."

"No excuses, young man. Every one is apt ter make mistakes. I'm just goin' on a hunt arter a little rum an' molasses. Ef you'll join me ye'r welcome."

"Thank you, sir; your kind offer is highly appreciated, but, you see, I belong to the Young Men's Christian Association, and don't indulge. Much obliged, just the same. Good-day, sir!"

Then Old Hayseed waddled on, followed by a bevy of boys.

The younger genteel crook, who had mistaken him for the man from Canajoharie, went in the opposite direction, a few paces, and then suddenly boarded a down-town Broadway car.

Sol Sharpe had been a witness to this meeting, and had heard what had passed between the two men.

"Just as I expected!" he said to himself. "I'll bet my life that bunco chap gets off the car, and gives the top-lofty tip to Bunco Jim."

He stepped to the edge of the curb, and, sure enough, when the car came opposite to where Bunco Jim was standing, the young crook

sprung off, and became lost in the intervening crowd that intercepted Sol's observation.

"Correct! Josiah Ramsey will now encounter some one that knows him!" the detective reflected, "and I'll be shot if I don't see this matter through, if it costs me a lung. If the old gent from Cattaraugus county don't get fleeced, it will be because I won't permit it."

By a little skillful maneuvering, the detective managed to work his way ahead through the crowd, until he had very nearly overtaken the farmer—drew as near, indeed, as he cared to get.

When Ramsey reached the point where Bunco Jim was in waiting, that personage stepped quickly from the doorway, and clapped the old farmer on the shoulder familiarly.

"Why, friend Ramsey, how do you do!" he accosted, pulling his intended victim to one side, out of the way of the crowd. "Really, I am surprised to see you so far away from Little Valley!"

"Eh? You are, eh?" and Ramsey readjusted his spectacles, and gave his accoster an interrogative stare. "Who ther mischief are you?"

"Me! Why can it possible you have forgotten me? I was up your way last fall, buying up cattle. If you remember, I gave a call on you. I'm Jim White, the drover."

"Oh! you are, eh? Seems to me I do remember suthin' about it, tho' I can't recall faces as well as Iuster could. So you're White? Oh! say, you ain't the chap as tried to b'y that sorrel colt o' mine, what was sired by Flyer, an' dammed by Lady Jane?"

"The very same chap, sir, I assure you. We couldn't make a bargain, however, for your figures were too high!"

"Well! well! Glad to see you. Met another feller back here, as tho't he know'd me, but I wasn't from the place he tho't I was. 'Pears to me you hev changed, since you were up at Little Valley, have you not?"

"Perhaps I have. These side-whiskers make my most intimate friends scarcely recognize me. Then, too, riches often make a change in one's appearance. You know, I've fallen heir to a fortune, since I saw you last, friend Ramsey—a cool half a million, all in spot cash!"

"Waal, now, ye don't tell me! That's a heap of money, I swow!"

"Yes, quite a lot. But, I'm not one of these fellows that hoards up money. All I get goes about as easy as it comes, and sometimes a little easier. By the way, I haven't had a morning punch, so I propose we drop down to Blood's—Blood is a friend of mine, you see—and take something. Fred's place ain't the highest-toned saloon in town, as fer looks, but it is patronized by a large number of wealthy business-men, because the liquor he sets out is A 1, you see!"

"Jes' so! jes' so! I see. It ain't allers the best-lukin' place where ye git the best caliker," the man from Cattaraugus averred. "Don't mind if I do take a drap this mornin', for it aire a powerful nasty mornin'!"

"Right you be. Come right along, and as we drink we'll have a chat."

And, locking arms with his intended dupe, Bunco Jim led him down Broadway.

Close behind them, one among a dozen others, followed Sol Sharpe, his sense of hearing on the alert to catch any further conversation between the twain in advance of him.

He well knew where "Blood's" was on East Houston street—one of the most dangerous places in the metropolis for an honest man to enter—a resort for criminals of every class, as well as a "fence" for stolen goods.

It therefore was probably one of the safest resorts of its kind in the city for crooks, for it was alleged that Blood, who had a power of money, had a clean sweep of politics in his district, and hence no trouble was taken by the authorities to inquire into the character of his place or the gang who frequented it.

The precinct had an unenviable reputation, but Blood's place was not thereby watched or spotted.

Sol Sharpe was known at Blood's. He had frequently made it a point to drop in there for a glass of beer, and had mingled familiarly among the *habitués*, until they had ceased to look upon him with suspicion.

Indeed, as he generally "set 'em up for the crowd," he had come to be regarded as a good pal to stick by, both by the proprietor and his patrons.

Sol's object in thus making himself at home at Blood's den was, of course, wholly professional—to ingratiate himself in the confidence of the proprietor, so that he would be welcome there when he might most need to be.

He now followed behind Bunco Jim and

Farmer Ramsey, until he saw them turn off Broadway into Houston street, eastward bound. But he knew better than to dog them through this thoroughfare; what he wanted was to get to Blood's ahead of them, if possible.

They were walking along quite leisurely; so Sol hurried on down Broadway at a rapid gait, turned east into the next cross street, and sped along to the Bowery.

Reaching that, he returned to the eastern lower corner of Bowery and Houston and looked west.

He had made good time. The steerer and the farmer were coming toward the Bowery, but were still some distance away.

Without waiting to see more, Sol Sharpe set out for the saloon, and arrived in good time.

It was a rather large apartment containing a bar and several chairs and tables, but the ceiling was low and smoke-begrimed, and the place generally foul-smelling.

But two persons were in the bar-room when Sol entered. Both recognized him, and nodded "good-morning."

One was Fred Blood in person, who was cleaning up behind the bar—a brawny, florid-faced individual with a monstrous blonde mustache and rather genial appearance.

The other was a dapper little man with ferret eyes, who presided at a corner table on which was a long pasteboard box, filled with straw-colored envelopes—perhaps two hundred, all told.

"There are prizes among these envelopes, gentlemen, ranging from one dollar to one hundred, and it costs you but a dollar to try your chance!" this obliging fellow sung out with a winning smile, as Sol entered.

"Thank you—not to-day!" Sol replied, graciously.

Then to Blood:

"I'm clean dead-busted, old boy, and dry as a landed salt-water shark. Goin' to say?"

"Well, I guess!" the proprietor serenely smiled, as he set forth the "rat" bottle. "You're square, Reddy, and as neither of us have nipped this *matin*, we'll do it now. Come, Jerry!"

And the three had a social drink, Sol touching but lightly—a custom of his.

"Bad biz, eh?" suggested Blood, after the "pizen" had been put down.

"Never knowed it worse," Sol replied.

"These hypocritical church folks must have been stirrin' up Inspector Byrnes, for the cops aire gittin' as fly as a fox. How's things wi' you an' the boys?"

"Nothin' much a-doin'!" was the reply. "The business o' this country is goin' to the dogs, as fast as et can. If there ain't a change o' administration soon, we shall all go bankrupt!"

Sol fully agreed with him, his mind reverting to the lonely two dollars in his pocket.

"Yes, ye'r right," he said, "and if I don't strike a lay before night I don't know what I'm goin' to do."

"Don't let that fret you," replied Blood. "Ye'r free when ye'r flush, an' et's a cold country as hasn't a haven for the shipwrecked."

Sol picked up a paper, sat down at one of the tables and began to scan the local columns, while Jerry returned to the superintendency of his box of envelopes.

Sharpe had been seated but a few minutes when the door of the "Nest Egg" opened, and two persons entered—Bunco Jim and Josiah Ramsey, the farmer from Cattaraugus county.

The bird was at last in the cage!

CHAPTER III.

THE SKIN GAME.

SOL SHARPE was very much interested in the newspaper, apparently, when the two men walked into the saloon, and although they entered with considerable noise, the young detective scarcely raised his eyes to look at them.

It struck him, however, that Josiah Ramsey, at least, had been indulging in one or more drinks, since leaving Broadway.

"Here we are!" Jim said, as they entered. "This is Fred Blood's place, and there is Fred himself behind the bar. I tell you, Mr. Ramsey, a white man keeps this place, and none but white men come here, or else I wouldn't have brought you here. Come up, and I'll give ye an inter-dooce to Fred!"

As they reached the bar, Jim continued:

"Fred, this is Mr. Josiah Ramsey, one of the sterling and most influential citizens of Little Valley, New York—had the honor of making his acquaintance last fall, when I was out through that section buying up horses. My, but you ought to see the fine stock-farm he's got—the perfection of neatness and thrift, and one of the best in the State, not excepting your

own. Ramsey, old boy, this is Fred Blood, the white man from White Plains, where he's got a farm o' a thousand acres!"

"Ramsey, I'm rejoiced to know you," said the proprietor.

"An' since ye'r from the country I'm tickled to know you," declared Ramsey, whereupon the men shook hands heartily.

"By the way, Fred," continued Jim, "if you've got a little of that old good stuff, we wouldn't mind killin' the chill o' the day. Ramsey, here, is a connoisseur of prime whisky, and I brought him where he could find it. Won't your friends also join us?"

And the bunco-steerer leveled a sharp glance at Sol Sharpe.

"Why, I guess so. Come up, boys. They're both first-water gentlemen, with whom it is an honor to be acquainted,"—this to Ramsey.

Both Sharpe and Jerry responded to the invitation, whereupon Blood went on:

"Gentlemen, I'll make you acquainted with Mr. Reddy Maginness of the Board of Aldermen of this city"—indicating Sharpe—"and Mr. Oscar Lake, of the New Orleans Lottery. Messrs. Maginness and Lake, Messrs. Ramsey and White."

The introduction was acknowledged; then, the bottle was set forth, and all hands indulged.

Mr. Ramsey thought he would indulge in a little rum and molasses, his favorite drink, and after it was prepared for him, he downed it with apparent relish.

"Now, we'll sit down and have a chat," Jim said. "I suppose you've no pressing engagements to prevent you from passing away a few minutes—and there isn't a more quiet and orderly place in the city to spend a social hour in than here."

"No! I haven't nothin' to hinder," Ramsey assented, as they took a seat at one of the tables.

"I've got my bizness all cleaned up, and were thinkin' of lookin' around the city some."

"To see the sights, I suppose."

"Durned if you hain't hit it," Ramsey replied.

"I've hearn tell a sight about what's goin' on heer in New York, an' I've made up my mind to take a look around."

"Good idea, and I'm the very chap to take you around where there's music in the air."

"That's what I want, and I reckon you an' I had better tie up together for the day."

"It's a bargain. I know every crook and cranny in the metropolis, and I can show you some sights that will open your eyes. By the way, how is everything in old Cat county, anyhow?"

"Waal, 'bout the same as usual. Pork is sellin' better'n last fall, an' so is wheat, while cattle are prime. But purtaters—why, drat me ef ye kin give 'em away at fifteen cents a bushell!"

"Don't say. How's your stock doing?"

"Fine, what I've got left. Made a big thin'nin' out, because fodder was short. Run four carload down to Jersey City, an' got fair prices. Farmin' is gettin' to be rather slow bizness up our way, tho'—a darned pile o' work, an' small profits."

"You ought to speculate in stocks!"

"You bet!" chimed in Fred, from behind the bar. "Fortunes are made in a day. My friend Maginness, here, can tell you that. He works in Wall street some."

"Indeed!" said Bunco Jim, giving Sol another inquiring glance. "What did C. B. & Q. close at, yesterday, Mr. Maginness?"

"One-seventeen-and-a-half!" promptly responded the detective, who had only a few minutes before read the stock report.

Whether Mullen knew or not is hard to say, but the report seemed to appease his curiosity, for he once more turned his attention to the farmer.

"I don't dabble much in stocks myself," he said. "I made my fortune in a safer way!"

"How's that?" Ramsey asked.

"Well, I'll tell you. You remember I told you I had come into half a million."

"Yes, I recollect."

"Well, I'll tell you how I did it. You've no doubt heard of the New Orleans Nonpariel Lottery?"

"Dunno's I have."

"Well, there's a lottery down there by that name what has a drawing twice a day, and the holder of a lucky ticket gets from one thousand to twenty thousand dollars. Easiest way in the world to get rich. If you will step this way, I'll explain the whole thing to you."

Ramsey, poor greenhorn, was much interested, and accompanied Bunco Jim to Jerry's table, as did Sol Sharpe and Fred.

"You see this box!" began Jim, in explana-

tion. "Well, there's two hundred numbers in in the envelopes you see—one number in each envelope. In buying one of these envelopes you pay from ten dollars apiece upward. If you buy one envelope for \$10, you run one chance out of one hundred of drawing one thousand dollars. If you pay twenty, you stand two chances; thirty, you stand three chances, and so on, until you reach fifty. If you pay fifty you have five chances, and are as likely to draw the twenty thousand dollar prize as any other. There are but ten offices in the United States, each office holding two hundred tickets, or two thousand altogether, so that the total amount of prizes drawn, per day, depends altogether how much is paid for a single ticket. One day the company may be 'way ahead; the next, it may run behind. But, at all events, it always pays to invest heavy, because if you do make a haul, you get something worth having. I drew a thousand dollars yesterday, and have got fifty dollars staked on to-day's game. Of course, I hope to win."

"Still, you might step in and get the lucky number, and thereby block me out. It's all a fair and square game, as I well know by experience, and a man cannot invest money in a safer business venture. Eh, Fred—ain't I right?"

"Right you are, though some men have luck, and again, some haven't. I might stake all I'm worth, and never get a smell of a show!" modestly responded Fred.

"Waal, if luck hes got anything ter do with et, I orter do purty fair," spoke up Ramsey, who had been an attentive listener. "I allers did have a considerable luck, one way and another, an' I dunno as et has deserted the old man yet, tho' when et comes tew raisin' turkeys, I never hed a cent's worth o' luck."

"Well, you ought to try the lottery," declared Ramsey. "The chances are that you would strike a boodle, and you could then afford to carry home a sealskin sack to your wife. My! but how it would please the good old soul. I do think, Ramsey, that your woman is one of the best cooks in the State. I never enjoyed a meal so much in my life, as that one I ate up in the bonny farm-house, near Little Valley!"

"Waal, I guess so," Ramsey acknowledged, evidently highly pleased at the complimentary reference to his partner in life. "We do live, once in a while, ef I do say it. By the way, I hev got a notion to try my hand at this lottery thing. When I was younger I uster ter go to them 'ar church fairs, where you pay so much a whack, an' fish inter a well, with er pole an' line; an' I 'most allers ketched suthin', even ef it weren't more than a stick o' candy."

"I haven't a doubt but what you can make a haul here!" Bunco Jim assured, "and if I were you, I'd go et hull hog or none."

Just at this minute something on the under "double deck" of the table, Jerry's side, began to click, like a telegraph instrument.

Jerry instantly produced a blank paper pad, and a pencil, and began to write, as the clicking continued.

"An answer to the morning drawing," he said, glancing up at Bunco Jim. "Hal! there are three numbers yet unsold, or else you would stand a fine show for winning, Mr. White. Whoever takes the three numbers stands a hot show for the twenty thousand, next ballot. I reckon I've got a hundred and fifty what says I want them myself."

"Hold up there!" cried Bunco Jim, evidently in anger. "I've got something to say about that, I reckon, if I know myself. This game is played on the square, and as long as you get your pay for tendin' to the business, you've no right to invest!"

Then several remarks passed between the twain, that were notably impolite and inelegant.

"If there's any one in this place that takes the numbers, my friend Ramsey has first show!" Bunco Jim declared, belligerently, "and I can lick the man as says no, you bet."

"See here, we hain't goin' to have no fight about it—not in my place!" cried Fred. "I'm here, and I run this place, and if any one wants them numbers worse than I do, they've got to pay a premium for 'em, 'cause the highest der takes 'em!"

"That's right. The highest bidder has remaining two numbers, nineteen hundred ninety, sixteen and one. All the rest of numbers are sold!"

And here Jerry picked all but three envelopes out of the box, and stacked them to one side.

"There you are now: only three left to the tale, gents!"

"See here!" said Ramsey, "what are you ta-

ing all of them envelopes from the box for—thought they all had to be sold, first, 'fore'n a drawing comes off."

"They have all been sold!" explained Jerry. "For instance, in New Orleans and St. Louis, where they sell ten numbers to my one, when they run out of their own numbers, they immediately notify me that they can dispose of a certain number of mine, and call upon me for as many as they think they can dispose of. Hence I find by their telegram that they have sold all but three of my numbers, except what I had already disposed of; I know that three only remain to be sold, before the last drawing of the forenoon series would be, and placed in position of agent, as I am, I've an idea that— Well, go ahead. It's not my business to advise you!"

"I'll give fifty each for the tickets!" announced Fred, at the same time pulling out a wad of bills.

"Your fifty isn't kite-high, in a gale of wind. I'll go as high as two hundred each, on the strength of the prospect, and higher, if necessary. I mean to collar that boodle!" cried White.

This caused the farmer to pucker his lips into a whistle.

"Waal, I'll be durned!" he ejaculated. "I reckon as how if you can do that well, old Josiah Ramsey from Cattaraugus county ain't goin' to take no back seat. Ef them 'ar tickets be worth two hundred apiece to you, they be worth a leetle more to me, an' I'll make it five hundred each fer 'em, by jingo!"

"I'll go two hundred better than that!" cried Fred.

"While I'll go two hundred better than you!" announced Bunco Jim.

"Make it a thousand, and no more!" declared Ramsey, growing excited.

"I've offered my best!" said Fred.

"And the same here!" from Bunco Jim. "Ramsey gets the numbers for three thousand dollars."

"That's correct!" assented Jerry. "Fork over your cash, Ramsey, and then I'll telegraph to New Orleans, and see who gets the cash!"

Ramsey, who held a roll of bills in his hand, gazed at it meditatively a moment, as if in doubt whether he better make the venture, or not.

Sol Sharpe had been an interested looker-on, but it was not his purpose to interfere, at present.

For him to have done so, would not only have imperiled his personal safety, but he had another idea.

He remembered the name on the singular paper Molly had given him, to be "Ruth Ra—," the latter part of the name being missing. Might not "Ruth Ra—" be Ruth Ramsey?

Of course it was merely an idea, but the idea struck him with such force, that he could not dispel it from his mind.

Then, too, before causing Bunco Jim's arrest, he had a great curiosity to know what the criminal's acquaintance with Miss Agatha signified.

Owing to his being discharged from the employ of Agatha and Co., he somehow felt as if he would like to spring a surprise upon the senior member of the firm that would in a measure humble him.

Therefore, he offered no interference in the way of balking the plans of the party of three who had it in hand to swindle Josiah Ramsey out of his three thousand dollars.

"Come! come!" cried Bunco Jim to Ramsey. "You made the offer, an' it's no time now to back out. If you don't want the numbers at your own bid, I'll mighty quick take 'em at mine."

"Well, I'll run the risk, ef I bu'st a button!" finally decided the farmer, counting over his money, "an' ef I win, I'll treat; if I lose, the hull game is a swindle, an' by the holy jumpin' Jerusalem, I'll make ther hull blamed kerboodle of ye hump for et, or my name ain't Josiah Ramsey!"

"You'll do nothin' o' the sort!" cried Bunco Jim, with sudden fierceness. "I tell you, ye hadn't better insinuate that me an' the boys are swindlers, or you'r liable to get cracked one, on ther cocoanut! We're gentlemen, I'll have you know!"

"Yas, mebbe ye ai'e!" allowed Ramsey. "Waal, here's the three thousand dollars."

Now, then, go ahead with yer tickin' masheen, young feller, an' see ef I draw the prize!"

And so saying, he deposited the money in the hands of Mr. Oscar Lake.

Of course that cheat received it with rare graciousness, and tucked it away in his vest-pocket; then, reaching under the table, made a

pretense of sending a telegram on the instrument, which was really a telegraph instrument, with a wire from it running down into the cellar, where, without doubt, there was another similar machine, with another man stationed at it.

"How long's a feller got to wait before he gits an answer?" Ramsey demanded, listening to the ticking of the instrument, and at the same time eying Mr. Oscar Lake suspiciously.

"That depends altogether on circumstances," was the reply. "We can usually get an answer back in half an hour."

"Yes, that's about the average time it takes!" agreed Bunco Jim. "So come and sit down, Friend Ramsey, and we'll have something more to drink."

Ramsey did not object to this, and took more rum and molasses for his.

In fact, one drink after another was ordered and paid for, and the old man became rather hilarious.

By and by the machine ticked again, and Jerry said:

"Old gent, you'r in luck. You have drawn the capital prize! Twenty thousand dollars!"

"Then, by thunderation, let me have it!" Ramsey cried, springing to his feet, and dancing around as lively as a schoolboy. "Fork et over quicker'n greased lightning, till I go buy Mehetable a sealskin sacque!"

"We never carry so large a sum, but I'll give you a check on our bank, sir!" responded Jerry.

"Git out! How do I know where yer consarned bank is, an' they wouldn't pay it to me, a stranger, anyhow?" Ramsey cried. "I want the spot cash, or else my spondulicks back!"

"But do listen to reason!" persisted Jerry.

"It is preposterous to suppose we could keep so much ready money on hand. Tell you what I'll do. I'll draw you up a check, order a cab, and you and Mr. White can drive to the bank, where White can identify you so that you can draw the money. Will that not be all right?"

"Waal, I s'pose so!" Ramsey grunted. "Fetch around your cab at once, fer I'm anxious to get the dudads, and start back for Cattaraugus county."

"Very well!" and Jerry then turned to Sol Sharpe. "Mr. Maginness, will you do me the favor to go order a cab for the gentlemen? Here is a ten-dollar note, so be sure and get a good turn-out!"

For Sol to have hesitated would have excited suspicion, and so he perforce had to acquiesce.

Taking the proffered ten, he left the saloon.

He well enough understood what the game of the bunco-men was.

Bunco Jim would drive the farmer to some isolated part of the island, assist him to get out of the hack, and springing back in himself, would be hurriedly driven off, leaving Ramsey standing where he had alighted.

Being unacquainted with the metropolis, the poor dupe, even if he found his way back downtown, would not be able to find the place where he had been swindled out of his three thousand dollars, and even if he did, the chances were ten to one he wouldn't be able to find the two sharps who had been instrumental in doing it.

Just what to do under the circumstances, since matters had progressed as far as they had, Sharpe did not know, but he finally concluded that he could do no better than to let Bunco Jim carry out his plan, as he did not want to excite the boss bunco-steerer's suspicion that he was a detective, as, if he didn't, he could easier lay hands on him in the future.

As for Ramsey's three thousand dollars—well, that was about as good as gone up the spout.

It would learn the old fellow a lesson, providing Sol could not recover it, or a portion of it, which there was a bare possibility that he could.

So the detective proceeded to the nearest hack stand and selected the most reasonable-priced equipage he could get, thereby putting a couple of dollars in his own pocket.

He also took the number of the hack, and sized up the driver, so he would know him again.

He was a seedy-looking chap, who looked as if he couldn't have the nerve to refuse to give away a secret, providing the bribe was all right.

Directing the fellow where to go, Sol lingered in the vicinity of the hack-stand, as it was his purpose to interview the driver on his return and learn, if possible, where Farmer Ramsey had been left.

That Bunco Jim would attempt to assault the old fellow Sol had small fears, as all the villain cared for was to get his victim out of the way

long enough to give him an opportunity to secrete himself or else leave the city.

The detective presumed that, after Ramsey found out he had been duped, he would apply to some police station for redress for his wrongs, and in such a case Sol knew he should be able to get on track of him again.

So he waited patiently for the return of the hack, and learned meanwhile, from another hackman, that the name of the chap he had employed was Pat Moore.

At last, after a delay of over two hours, Sol had the satisfaction of seeing his man return and back into his place on the stand.

But the vehicle contained no passengers.

Sol at once approached the hackman and clapped him familiarly on the shoulder.

"Hello! Got back, have you?" he saluted.

"Yes, I've got back!" was the gruff response; "and divil another job av the loikes of that will I take again for that money."

"Why, where did you have to go?"

"Nearly out o' the city, to be sure."

"But where?"

"That you want to know for?" Pat demanded, suspiciously.

"Nothing; only if you had to go further than I think is right, perhaps I may give you a dollar extra."

Pat's eyes sparkled at this unwonted liberality.

"Well, I took 'em all the way up to a Hundred and Sixtieth, sur," he replied.

"Did you leave them there?"

"Only tha ould gent, sir. He was paralyzed drunk, sur, an' the other gint helped him into Tim Finnegan's saloon, an' thin he got into the hack and I driv him back."

"Where did you leave him?"

"Corner of Broadway and Houston, sur, an' he was gintleman enough to give me a tip of a V, sur."

"Then you've been sufficiently paid for your services!" Sol said, turning abruptly and walking away.

He chanced to know where Tim Finnegan's place was, and knew he could ride to within a short distance of it, on the Third Avenue Elevated.

So, without further ceremony he set out for Tim Finnegan's, to look up the man from Cattaraugus county.

CHAPTER IV.

TWO IRRITATING VISITORS.

AARON AGATHA, of the mercantile firm of Agatha & Co., of New York City, was on the shady side of fifty, short, thick-set, and with florid face, and by his robust appearance evidently lived on the fat of the land.

His eyes were of a cold gray color, while an expression about the mouth suggested a grasping nature.

Which was true. To his avarice the fortune he was said to possess was almost wholly due.

He was subject to that unpleasant ailment, the gout, and on the morning which opens our story, had been seized with an attack.

As he sat in an easy-chair in the parlor of his handsomely-furnished Lexington avenue residence, engaged in nursing his swollen feet, his temper was anything but the best, and he snarled and grumbled to himself almost incessantly, and his surliness was not abated when, on looking up, he saw a seedy-looking individual standing near him—judging by his appearance, a cross between the country tramp and the city bum.

"Mornin'," he saluted, as Agatha looked up. "Got er tech of gout, ag'in, I reckon."

"Curse you, what's that your business. How did you get in here?"

"By the front door," was the unruffled answer. "Found it open an' walked in. Ain't ye glad to see me?"

"No, I'm not glad to see you, and I command you to leave the house at once."

The bum grinned, and winked one eye.

"How much you give me ter go?" he asked.

"Not one red cent!" thundered Agatha. "If you don't go at once, I'll send for a policeman and have you locked up!"

The bum chuckled defiantly.

"Pshaw! you wouldn't dare to be doin' that, brother Aaron!" he declared. "You are too shrewd a man to risk exposure at this late date."

"Bah! who fears you? You've sucked all of the money out of me you ever will. No one would believe a despicable wretch like you, even under oath, and you know it!"

"Don't be too sure about that. Jim Agatha weren't allus the sort of a man he is now. Ye know I hold that important paper, an' what I

can do with it; then, there's another secret I'll bet you wouldn't have exposed for all you're worth."

"Bah!" and the merchant snapped his fingers contemptuously.

"Do you want me to tell you what ther secret is?" Jim Agatha demanded, sneeringly.

"Yes!"

The bumner stepped to his wealthier brother's side, and whispered something in his ear, at which Aaron Agatha uttered an oath.

"You lie, you hound, you lie!" he cried savagely.

"Not a bit of it," Jim replied, "and if I don't get money I'll give the hull thing away."

"Curse you, I've a mind to kill you!"

"You can't do it. In the first place, you can't get up, an' in the second place, if you could get up you couldn't hurt one side o' me. So pony up yer money, afore I go to the gal who—"

"Curses seize you!" hissed the elder Agatha. "How much do you want to keep that infernal trap of yours shut?"

"Oh! I'm no hog ef I am good-lookin'!" Jim assured, graciously. "A five-hundred-dollar note would cover my bazoo like a charm."

Without further ceremony, Aaron Agatha drew a well-stuffed wallet from his pocket, and cast it at his bumner brother's feet.

"There, take that, and get out of my house, and never dare to show your face here again. If you do, I'll put a bullet through your vile heart!"

"Pshaw! My good weskit is tough enough to flatten a dozen bullets!" Jim said, with one of his peculiarly tantalizing grins. "However, this will stand me for a week or so. How much is there of it?"

"Over five hundred."

"Oh! then I can make it stand me in for a month. Much obleeged fer the 'commodation, brother. When you turn up yer toes an' croak, an' make me your heir, I'll see that you're buried in a silver-plated coffin. Tal tal! Give my regards to Aggie. Tal tal!"

And turning, Jim Agatha left the room, chuckling softly to himself; while Aaron Agatha sat nursing his gout, and cursed himself for being weak enough to accede to his disolute brother's demands.

Had he been able to get up and touch the call-bell, he would have summoned a servant to secure the front door, which his daughter had inadvertently left unlocked when she left the house to go down-town; but the slightest movement caused him a twinge of pain, and the servants were in another part of the house, where they could not hear his voice.

Jim Agatha had not been gone an hour, when the merchant became aware that some one else was in his presence, and looking over the top of the paper he had been reading, he beheld no less a personage than Merry Molly Marble.

For a moment his astonishment knew no bounds.

What was the meaning of all this, anyhow?

What sort of a pass were things coming to, that bummers and common street-waifs had the audacity to invade his privacy with impunity, and he the wealthy and aristocratic Aaron Agatha?

For a moment he glared at Merry Moll in silence, but she answered with a nod and a good-natured grin.

"How aire ye, boss?" she saluted. "What's the matter with yer? Got ther rumaticks?"

"What business is that to you, girl? What brings you here? How dare you enter my house? I'll have you arrested!"

"Bet you won't! There ain't a cop in the neighborhood. I was down to your store awhile ago, but they sed you wasn't there, so I come up here. Goin' ter let me serve ye with papers?"

"No, confound you! Clear out—get out of the house, I tell you. D'ye hear?"

"I hear. I ain't deaf yet. There isn't any silver threads 'mong my gold, an' folks don't 'most always sometimes get deaf until they either git gray-haired or bald. But that ain't what I come fer. I've got a bone to pick with you, 'Gatha, an' I don't mind tellin' you to your face that I think you're the meanest old skin-flint there is 'twixt here and Weehawken!"

"Girl, I'll stand no such talk from a chit of a child like you!" shouted Agatha, fuming with rage.

"Talk's cheap!" retorted Molly. "You can't help yourself. You can't get out o' that chair, and if you could, you couldn't catch me. No! 'Gatha, you're mean as can be, for dischargin' Sol Sharpe, fer he never spoke a word to your stuck-up-daughter, in his life. But, the meanest

part of the hull bizness was for you to hold back part o' his wages—you a rich old snoozer, that can count your money by millions. You orter be ashamed o' yerself. If I was as mean as that, I'd go drown myself in the sewer. I've hearn tell o' the meanest man not havin' been found, but I'll bet what papers I've got left here, against a bald-headed cat, that you're the man!"

Aaron Agatha had by this time grown fairly furious.

He made an attempt to get out of his chair so as to seize and chastise his tantalizer, but a sharp twinge of pain caused him to sink back with a groan.

"Well, go on with your blackguardism!" he hissed, "but mind you, when I get about again, I'll have you arrested, and make you smart for this!"

"If you do, you'll have to be smarter nor you be now," laughed Molly. "I jest called to give you a piece o' my mind—that's all. Buy a paper fore I go? Won't, eh? Oh! well, keep your money; I don't want it. Tra-la-la! Hope you'll get the gout in your tongue. By-by, baby!"

And Molly left the room, with a merry laugh.

CHAPTER V.

A DOUBLE TRAIL.

SOL SHARPE lost no time in making his way to the Elevated Railway Station, at 14th street and Third avenue, where he boarded an uptown train, and from the terminus of the road had several blocks to walk before he reached Tim Finnegan's saloon.

Before entering, Sol took an outward survey of the place, and found it was a rather respectable-looking resort, the building being comparatively new. The neighborhood was sparsely settled.

But two other persons were present when the detective entered—one being Finnegan himself, who was washing up glasses behind the bar, and the other was Josiah Ramsey, who sat by a table, with his arms spread out upon it, and his head bowed forward between them.

"Top av the mornin' to you!" saluted Finnegan. "Phat can I be doin' for yez this fine mornin'?"

"Oh! give me a small ale," replied Sol. "By the way, what are you doing with old Hayseed, away out here?"

"Phy, do you know him, thin?" queried Finnegan, in surprise.

"Yes, I know of him, and where lives. But, how comes he 'way out here, dead drunk?"

"He didn't get a divil av a drop here," the Irishman hastened to say. "I'll tell you all about it, tho'. A couple av hours ago, or so, a hack drove up to my place, and a high-toned lookin' bucko assisted the old chap to alight, an' fetchin' him into my saloon, he plumped him down, just as you see him now. The old fellow was blind full, and the younger chap he turned to me, and he sez, sez he: 'The old gent is my father, but has got too full for business. I have to drive on a little further, but will be back in an hour. If you'll kindly let him rest there till my return, I'll pay you five dollars for the accommodation.'"

"Well, I don't get hold of a five every day, and so I concluded to take the offer, but the young bucko hasn't returned yet."

"Nor is he likely to!" Sol declared. "This old man is a countryman, while the other was one of the cleverest bunco-steerers in the country. He took the farmer in, did him up to the tune of three thousand dollars, then brought him out here under pretense of taking him to the bank, and left him in your charge in order to give himself a chance to escape."

"The divil you say!" exclaimed Tim. "An' who are you, to be sure?"

"I am Sol Sharpe, the detective."

"Troth, an' is that so? I'm glad to meet yez, Misther Sharpe, but it's hopin' I am you won't be thinkin' I had anything to do in the matter, for I did not."

"I understand that," Sol replied. "The farmer is not drunk, but is drugged. We must try to arouse him from this stupor."

They set to work in dead earnest, and put old Ramsey through a course that might well have awakened a dead man.

After nearly half an hour they succeeded in so arousing him that he was in full possession of his senses.

Then gradually dawned upon his mind a dim recollection of his investment at "Fred's" saloon, and of his carriage ride, but he did not, of course, recognize the place where he now found himself.

"Hal! where am I?" he demanded, gazing around him in a bewildered way. "Where am I, and where's my friend, Jim White?"

"Your friend, Jim White, has vamoosed!" Sol Sharpe answered. "He brought you out here to sleep off the drug that was put in the rum and molasses you drank, while Jimmy has fled back to secrete himself among the haunts of New York's rogues and jail-birds."

"And my money—my three thousand dollars?"

"Is ere now divided between Jim and his confederate at the table. Ramsey, you're an unmitigated ass!"

"I see it now—I see it now!" the farmer fairly groaned, as he removed his hat, and rubbed his bald pate. "Yes, I'm a consarned, blamed idiot, if ever there was one in existence. That lottery business was all a gosh-hanged fraud, then, was it?"

"Exactly!—a regular skin-game, got up to swindle all such old hayseed gillies as you!"

"Waal, I'll be darned! But, look a-heer, young man: you were thar—I remember that, for I treated ye."

"Yes, I was there," Sol admitted.

"An', durn yer picter, ye stood in wi' the gang, an' see 'em rob me."

"I had nothing to do in the matter. I was merely a looker-on in the capacity of a detective."

"Ye war, hey? Then, why in darn-nation didn't ye tell me I was bein' skinned, an' save me from losin' my money?"

"Because it would have been worth my life to have interfered, and there is no telling but what you would have lost yours. It is a desperate gang that frequents that den, and more than one dark crime has been committed there. I have visited the place several times, in hopes of getting a clew by which I could pull the gang. And at last, it seems, I have got it!"

"Yas, you've got it, at my expense!" growled Ramsey.

"Even so!" returned Sol. "You ought to be glad that I am cognizant of the crime; for I shall doubtless be able to assist you in the matter."

"D'ye think ye kin get the money back?"

"Some of it perhaps—maybe all of it, I cannot tell for certain, until I work up the case, don't you see?"

"Then put 'er thar!" the old man said, thrusting forth his horny hand. "You can bet I'm powerful glad to meet one man in this pesky town who is half-way decent."

Sol shook hands with him, and received a grip that fairly made him wince.

"Have you any money left, Mr. Ramsey?" he asked.

"Waal, I guess I might rake up a couple o' thousand out o' the pocket o' my shirt, where I allus carries it," was the reply.

"That is fortunate, as we shall need money to prosecute this case, and as my own cash is at low-water mark you'll have to help foot the cost."

"Don't let that fret you. If you want money, that is all right, as long as we get square with them 'tarnal blacklegs."

"Well, you can rest assured that I'll fix them, within a fortnight, even if I don't succeed in getting your money back. They're as fly as they make 'em, and I shall have to figure cautiously, but I'll score a victory before many days. You remember the chap who accompanied you out here?"

"Waal, I guess I orter!" Josiah declared, dryly.

"Won't be apt to forget him very soon, I dare say?"

"Not muchly!"

"Well, that fellow was Jim Mullen, alias Bunco Jim, one of the shrewdest bunco-steerers in the country. He has only been released from prison a few days, and has started in at his old tricks again. Once I sock him into jail again, you can bet he will stay there for one good long term."

"Bully fer you, young man, bully fer you! I'm glad to see you've got spunk. You remind me of a yearling bull I've got, up in Cattaraugus county—spunkiest critter ye ever see in yer born days. But say: ye hain't told me yer real name, hev ye?"

"My name, sir, is Solomon Sharpe—Sol 'for short. And now, let's get back to your room at the hotel, where I have some important questions to ask you. At what hotel are you stoppin'?"

"At the Saint Nicholas."

They then left the saloon, walked to the nearest Elevated Station, boarded a train, and were whirled away down-town.

While en route, Ramsey handed Sol two hundred dollars for incidental expenses, with the assurance that he should have more as soon as

needed; and Sol really felt quite rich in possession of so much money.

At last they reached the hotel, and were closeted in the room that had been assigned to Ramsey.

After he had spent several minutes in deep thought, Sol Sharpe asked:

"Mr. Ramsey, what brought you to New York?"

"Why, I cum down wi' a lot o' stock I had to sell, an' I sold 'em, too. But the three thousand I got fer 'em is gone, an' I wish I'd left 'em to home."

"Exactly. But hadn't you some other object than bringing your stock, that caused you to come here?"

The farmer bridged his spectacles higher on his nose, and gazed at the detective, curiously.

"Why d'ye ask that?" he demanded.

"Answer me the few questions I ask you, and then I will explain my inquisitiveness, to your full satisfaction."

"Waal, yes, I don't mind tellin' ye thet I *did* have another object in comin' here."

"Since you have been married, how many children have blessed your union?"

"Only one!" and rather a pained expression flitted over the old man's ruddy face.

"Boy or a girl?"

"It was a girl."

"Must have been born a number of years ago?"

"Yes, yes, a good many years ago. If she had a child living now, it would be purty well on toward its majority."

"Is your daughter living?"

"I dunno. I come to New York partly to find out."

"How long since you saw her?"

"Near eighteen years ago. She then eloped with a fellow—a traveling agent—and got married. Then she came home, and he went about his business. A little over a year afterward, after her babe had bin born, she got a letter from him, ordering her to come on, as he had provided a home for her. She was eager to go, but we forbid her to. It didn't do no good, though, for, taking her child and a sum of money that had been left her, she skinned out, an' that's the last we've ever seen or heard of her."

"Was her child a boy or girl?"

"A girl."

"Your daughter's name?"

"It was Ruth!"

Sol Sharpe could scarcely refrain from giving utterance to a cry of astonishment.

Could it be—was it possible that he had found a clew to the mysterious message he had received from Merry Molly?

"What was the name of the man with whom your daughter eloped?" he next inquired.

"His name was Aaron Agatha!"

Had he been shot at that moment, Sol Sharpe could not have been more astonished.

Aaron Agatha the husband of Ruth Ramsey, and Ruth Ramsey shut up in a mad-house!

Could such a thing be?

Was Aaron Agatha such a human demon as all that would prove him to be?

These thoughts flashed across his mind like lightning, while, to hide his astonishment, he pretended to be attacked by a violent fit of coughing.

It was a dismal failure, however, as he was made aware, when, on recovering, Josiah Ramsey said:

"Mr. Sharpe, what do you know about my daughter Ruth?"

But Sol was partly prepared for the question, and made answer without hesitation:

"Well, Mr. Ramsey, perhaps I know more of her than yourself, and, again, perhaps I do not. Do you not consider it strange you have not heard from her in all these years? If she were a good daughter to you, I should have thought she would have written."

"That's what has puzzled me and my old woman a good deal!" the farmer said. "She was such a warm-hearted and affectionate girl, before she eloped, that it has nigh broken our hearts to think she could fergit—I swow ef it ain't."

"I don't wonder at that, at all. Do you think if you were to see a specimen of her handwriting now, that you would recognize it after all these years? Of course you know a person's writing varies in various respects, as the years jog along!"

"Ruth wouldn't vary a bit, and I could tell her writin' among a thousand other sorts!"

"Then see, this looks anything like her chi-rography!"

And taking the mud-stained slip from his pocket, Sol handed it to the farmer.

The moment he laid eyes upon it, a glad light beamed from his eyes, and he sprang to his feet excitedly.

"It's Ruth's writin'!" he cried—"by the great Christopher Columbus, it's Ruth's writin', sure's preachin'. Whar d'ye get this, young man?"

"Read it through, and then I'll tell you," Sol replied, quietly.

Ramsey obeyed, and then sunk back upon his chair with a groan.

"My God! what does this mean?" he gasped, looking wonderfully pale for a man of his florid complexion.

"It means," replied Sol, "that if the writer of those lines is your daughter, she is, and has been for sixteen years, locked up in a private insane asylum in this city!"

"Where did ye git this 'ere paper?"

"It was found in the street by a young news-girl—a friend of mine—and brought to me. She found it at Third avenue and 48th street, but there is no telling how far it had been blown before she found it, you see."

"Young man, we must find that mad-house ef it costs fifty thousand. The one that writ them 'ar lines are my daughter. Thar's no guess-work about et—I know et! Oh, God! to think that through her own waywardness she should ever have come to this!"

"Mr. Ramsey, as you say, the matter must be investigated. I was about to tackle it, as a disinterested party, when I saw Bunco Jim pulling you into the den of 'Jack' Hudson. Now, I am willing to undertake to work up this case, if you will promise me to do one thing."

"What is it?"

"Remain right here in this hotel, and not step even a foot outside of it, while I am working up the case, unless I direct you to do so!"

"And what is this for?"

"Promise me first, then I'll tell you."

"Of course I promise—sart'in sure. I'll do anything as long as you find and free my poor long-lost daughter."

"Rest assured I shall try to find her. One reason I want you keep in the hotel is this: Aaron Agatha is a wealthy merchant of this city, and is said to be a widower. He has a grown-up daughter of nineteen or twenty, but she does not resemble either him or you. Now if this woman in Lascar's asylum is indeed your daughter, there can be but little doubt but what Agatha put her there."

"Why not arrest the scoundrel at once!"

"Softly, softly! We must creep before we walk. We must have positive evidence before arresting any one. But, as I was going to say: if Agatha is guilty, and he should happen to meet you on the street, his natural conclusion would be that you were in search of your daughter, and would be likely to prosecute such inquiries as would make it unpleasant for him. Therefore, he being a man of little principle, as I have occasion to know, he would not hesitate to employ means to put you where you could do him no harm."

Farmer Ramsey agreed that there was good sense in Sol's argument, and promised again that he would not leave the hotel, unless the detective so ordained.

So, after promising to do all in his power for the farmer, Sol Sharpe took his leave, and went to his own dingy room, to deliberate over what had occurred that day, and what he had found out, and to form plans for the future.

Before him lay a job of no small magnitude, and one that promised to tax all his ingenuity to develop.

But he had indomitable pluck and will-power, and was firmly resolved to win a victory, if it cost him a year's unceasing labor.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DREAM.

THE first thing on the programme, as he looked at it, was to locate the private asylum where Ruth was confined.

This seemed like a difficult job in a great city like New York, with its countless private dwellings, flats and public institutions, for, beyond that scrap of paper, what actual clew had the young detective to go by?

To be sure, the paper had been found at Third avenue and 48th street, but, really, that amounted to nothing.

It might have been blown three or four miles, for that matter, before being discovered by Merry Molly.

Sharpe finally left his room, walked over to Third avenue, took a street-car, and got off at 48th street.

The balance of the day was spent in canvass-

ing the neighborhood for churches with a steeple-clock.

He found one, at length, but it was some little distance from the location where Ruth Ramsey's message had been found.

The neighborhood was made up mostly of private dwellings, which were evidently occupied by people of wealth.

It was by this time dusk, and so Sol desisted from further search, and returned to his room in Macdougall street.

Before going to his room, however, he procured a Directory from a neighboring drug-store, and spent the evening in looking it over, particularly scanning the "L's," but did not run across the name of Doctor Lascar.

"About as I expected!" he muttered, as he carried the huge volume back to the drug-store. "Whoever Ruth Ramsey's keeper may be it is plain that he has given her a fictitious name, so that, should she escape, her charge against Doctor Lascar could not well be substantiated, as no such doctor as Lascar could be found."

Much fatigued, he now retired for the night, and was soon fast asleep.

In his slumber he had a vivid dream.

It was something unusual for him to dream, but he dreamt now in dead earnest.

He saw the house of Doctor Lascar!

It was a large four-story brick structure, set a little apart from the other buildings on the right and left. But half a block from it stood a church, in whose steeple was an illuminated clock.

In his dream, Sol thought he paused in front of the house before mentioned, and scrutinized its front critically, so that he would know it again.

There were white marble steps in front of the door, and inside blinds to all the windows; otherwise the exterior had no peculiarities.

Then the door was suddenly opened by invisible hands and Sol entered. Intuitively he ascended the stairs that led from the hall, and continued his ascent until he reached the fourth story.

Here he paused and listened.

All was as silent as the tomb.

He next advanced through a dark hallway, until a strange sight met his gaze.

Through a transparent door, he could see into the prison of the long-lost Ruth.

Lying prostrate, face downward, upon the floor, was the victim, whose garments were simply a mass of rags.

She was moaning piteously; then, all of a sudden, she gave vent to a piercing shriek of the most startling character.

It was this fancied shriek that awakened Sol Sharpe from his dream, and brought him up to a sitting position in bed.

His face was beaded with perspiration, and he had to look sharply around his dingy apartment several times before he could convince himself that what he had dreamed was not reality.

There was no more sleep for him that night, and so he arose and dressed, and seated himself at the window.

The city was silent, and there was not a pedestrian on the dimly-lighted street below, by which he knew that it must be past the midnight hour.

His dream had affected the young detective more strangely than any other experience of his life. Things had been so vividly plain and natural before his mind's eye that he could not dismiss the subject from his thoughts.

"I don't take much stock in dreams," he soliloquized, "but I'll be hanged if I don't believe there is something in this one. That church was the very one I saw to-day, I know, and the house, evidently, is but a few feet from it, on the same street. I wish it were daylight, and you can bet I'd lose no time in investigating the matter! I just as much believe that by my dream I have hit upon the house where Ruth Ramsey is confined, as I believe that I am living."

So, with no little impatience, he awaited the coming of dawn, and in his eagerness it seemed to him that he had never known the hours to drag along so slowly.

At the first streaks of daybreak he made his toilet, pinned a detective's badge underneath the lapel of his vest, and sallied forth.

His first move was to get some breakfast, after which he hurried across town to Third avenue, and boarded an up-town car.

Half an hour later, he stood in front of the church with the clock-tower.

"The identical church of my dream," he mused, as he scanned the exterior of the edifice. "Now, then, to locate the house!"

He was not certain whether it was to the eastward or westward of the church; so he walked a block and a half to the eastward, first, and carefully scrutinized every building, but none answered to the description of the one in his dream.

So he retraced his footsteps, repassed the church, and walked slowly to the westward, on the opposite side of the street from the church.

He had gone but little over half a block, when he suddenly paused, with a low cry of exultation.

Eureka! he had found it!

Across the street was a very duplicate of the house of his dream—an imposing brick dwelling, with two broad alleyways on either side of it, separating it from the adjoining structures.

There were white marble steps in front, and inside blinds, which were tightly closed.

There was not, however, about the front of the building, anything to indicate that a physician resided inside—no sign, door-plate or anything of the sort.

"Yes, that's the place," Sol muttered, "but it don't look as if a doctor lived there. However, if it is a private or secret insane asylum, a sign may not be necessary. I'll bet my head that's the place I'm looking for, though, and that Ramsey's daughter is shut up in there. But, the question is—how am I going to prove it?"

He took a turn up and down the street, but could hit upon no feasible plan.

"Well, there's no use of my lingering around here any longer, at present, I guess," he muttered, "for I don't see any immediate way of discovering any more than I have already discovered. I must conceive some way of getting into that house, and finding out that which I want to find out."

So he started for down-town.

In repassing the suspected house, he perceived that the blinds of one of the second story windows had been opened, and a man stood looking down upon the street.

He was only partly dressed and had evidently just arisen from bed.

Sol Sharpe gave him one keen, memorizing glance—then passed on.

His was a face that would have been decidedly hawkish but for the full beard he wore.

"If that's the doctor, I'll know him the next time I see him!" the young detective muttered.

He went directly down-town and to Farmer Ramsey's room.

The old gent from Cattaraugus county was just partaking of his breakfast and gave Sol a hearty welcome.

In answer to his inquiries Sol told him that he had learned nothing definite but expected to in a day or so; and this seemed to cheer Mr. Ramsey.

Just prior to Sol's departure they stood by the window chatting and looking down on the street to see Merry Moll on the opposite side of the street with a bundle of papers in under her arms, and heard her clear voice crying them off, at which sight and cry Josiah Ramsey suddenly clutched Sharpe by the shoulder.

"Quick! quick! stop that girl!" he cried, excitedly. "Hurry up, or she will be gone!"

"Do you want a paper?" queried Sol, not knowing what to make of the matter.

"No! no! Go stop that girl and bring her here to my room. Quick, I say—there's not a minute to be lost!"

Wondering if the farmer was going crazy the detective hurriedly left the room.

CHAPTER VII.

MOLLIE IN DEMAND.

SOL SHARPE had no difficulty in overtaking Merry Moll, who, was doing quite a trade in selling off her papers, as late as it was in the morning.

"Hello, Sharpey!" she saluted, as soon as she saw the detective. "Want a paper?"

"I want you, instead of a paper," Sol replied, with a smile. "So come right along without delay."

"Get out! D'ye suppose I'm going to miss selling all these papers, an' get stuck? Not Much! What d'ye want of me?"

"I don't want anything, but there's a man up here at the hotel that does. As soon as he saw you he became greatly excited, and sent me to fetch you to his room."

"Who is he?"

"An old gent from the country."

"Rich?"

"Yes."

"Think he wants to make me his heiress?"

"Perhaps."

"Well, you just tell him I'll be up to see him after I run off these papers."

"Never mind the papers, but come along with me."

"What, an' lose sixty cents? Well, I guess not!"

"Pshaw! I'll pay you for what papers you have!"

"You will?"

"Yes."

"Then fork over. Bizness is bizness."

Accordingly Sol paid her sixty cents, and she gave him the bundle of morning papers, comprising several different dailies.

Turning to a hungry-looking little street arab who stood near by, Sol gave him the papers, saying:

"Here, bub, you can have these to sell, and what you get is yours."

"Thankee, sir," and the look of gratitude that beamed from the boy's eyes as he took the papers more than repaid Sol for the trifling charity.

He and Molly then set out for the St. Nicholas.

"I wouldn't mind strikin' sech a snap as that every day," Molly declared. "It would be a big savin' on my lungs. Wonder what the old chap wants of me?"

"I don't know, but I'd advise you to bridle that tongue of yours when you get in his presence, and act as lady-like as you know how, for it may be to your advantage."

"Oh, I'll be as primp as a prune," Molly declared.

When they entered the hotel, Sol paused a moment at the office counter to explain why he was conducting the newsgirl up-stairs; then he and Molly ascended to Josiah Ramsey's room.

The farmer was seated by the window, waiting for them, evidently with the greatest expectation.

"This is Mr. Ramsey, Molly," Sol said, placing her a chair near the old gentleman, and bidding her be seated.

The farmer adjusted his spectacles, and took a good look at Molly, and then turned to Sol.

"Yes, yes!" he said; "I knew I wasn't mistaken. It's the living image o' her as she was eighteen year ago. Two peas couldn't be more alike."

"You mean to say that Molly here looks as your daughter Ruth did, then?"

"Jes' so. This girl aire the very counterpart o' my Ruth, of eighteen years ago. My child, what is your name?"

"Moll!"

"Molly, you mean?"

"Well, most of 'em as knows me finds it handiest to call me just plain Moll or Molly."

"What is your other name besides Molly?"

"Marble."

"Molly Marble, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do ye sell papers for a living?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long hev ye been doin' et?"

"Ever since I can remember."

"Have you no mother living?"

"No, sir."

"Do you remember your mother?"

"Nixy! Reckon she died before I was born—that is, before I was much big."

Both Sol and the farmer were forced to laugh at the odd reply.

"You have a father living, have you?" questioned Mr. Ramsey.

"Well, yes; a sort of one."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Oh! 'cause he ain't no good. He's a bum, and the bummiest sort of a bum, at that. He's about the nearest thing to nothing that walks on two legs."

"He contributes nothin' to your support, then?"

"Nix. If I depended on him fer s'port I'd be ready to go on a dime museum stage as a skilley-ton in a short time."

"What's his first name?"

"Jim."

"Jim Marble, eh?"

"Reckon so."

"Have ye ever had any idea, my child, that you might not be his daughter?"

"Yes. I've told him lots o' times I didn't believe he was my dad."

"What did he say to that?"

"Oh, he'd swear at me and call me a fool an' other pet names."

"Does he work?"

"Nary a work! He says he's too much of a gentleman to soil his hands with work."

And Molly laughed merrily.

"How, then, does he get his rum?"

"Give it up. He gets it, just the same. He hangs out around the tough resorts of the town all day, and 'most always comes home paralyzed drunk at night."

Mr. Ramsey remained silent for some minutes, but his gaze never left the face of the newsgirl.

Finally he said:

"You may go now. But come again in a couple of days, as I may have some good news for you. Sharpe, you may show her down, an' then return, fer I want to talk a bit more with you."

So Sharpe showed Molly how to get out of the hotel, and then returned to Mr. Ramsey's room.

"Sharpe," said the farmer, when the detective entered, "have you ever seen that girl before?"

"I've known her from the time, when a wee toddling child, she made her debut on the street as a newsgirl, sir. I have watched her as she grew up, year by year, with a sort of brotherly interest, and have often been able to render her a little pecuniary assistance. She has had a tough time of it, living with that beast who claims to be her father, and has been knocked about generally; but now she has grown up to be able to support herself and fight her own battles, and, better than all, where many girls of her age are easily lured to take the first step on the downward path, Molly knows enough to take care of herself."

"God bless you for what you have done for her!" the farmer said, fervently, "for, by the great jumpin' Jerusalem, I believe she's the babe, but now grown up, that Ruth took with her when she fled from home. Her face, her eyes, her hair, her very voice, all belong to my poor misguided child."

"Well, it may be possible that she is your grandchild, sir, and if so, we must look into the matter!"

"Yes! yes! the matter must be investigated. You must hunt up this fellow, Jim Marble, an' force the truth out o' him. If ye can't force him, buy him, an' ef ye can't buy him fer what money you've got, come to me and I'll give you more."

"Very well. I will give the matter consideration. And now, as I have other matters to occupy my attention, I will take my leave and call again as soon as I have time. Keep yourself quiet, and don't leave the hotel unless you receive orders from me!"

And with this injunction the detective took his departure.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANGELO PIZOT.

WHEN Merry Moll had departed, after her visit to Aaron Agatha, the merchant relapsed into meditation.

His square jaws were hard-set, and gave him an unusually grim appearance; his eyes gleamed dangerously.

"No! no! things ain't going right!" he muttered, finally. "Things ain't going right, and I'm in danger. Jim's appetite for whisky is making him both unreliable and treacherous. Then, too, he seems to be getting more and more cunning, and appears to have formed the idea that he can work me for whatever he wants. But he will find out his mistake. I'm not the man to risk exposure for the matter of one man's welfare!"

Upon the table were writing materials, and drawing the table in front of him the merchant dashed off a note, inclosed it in an envelope and directed it.

Then, at the expense of much pain, he hobbled to the side of the room and touched a button in the wall.

By the time he got back to his chair he was nearly exhausted from the pain which his gouty limbs gave him.

The summons was answered almost immediately by a spruce-looking young dandy in livery.

"Thomas, where have you been, sir, that you were not in the hallway, in attendance upon the door?" the master angrily demanded. "Two persons have already been here, intruding upon my privacy because the door wasn't locked, you black rascal!"

"De door was locked when I left it, sah. Be young missus must hab left it unlock, ne. When she went out, sah. I was down in de kitchen, gittin' suffin' to eat, sah."

"Jest like you, confound it—always eating. Go ring for a messenger-boy, and then see that you stay in the hall where you belong."

Glad to get off with so light a "blessing," Thomas hurriedly made his presence scarce.

In the course of twenty minutes a messenger-boy was ushered into the parlor.

"Take this letter to the address at once!" Agatha said, handing the envelope, and also a dollar—for the merchant was liberal enough where it was for his individual interests to be so—"and see that you don't let the grass grow in under your feet."

The boy nodded and left the room.

Aaron Agatha then leaned back in his chair and tried to sleep; but, evidently, his conscience was ill at ease, for sleep he could not, and he finally picked up a newspaper and tried to devote his time to reading.

Thus he managed to pass away a couple of hours, by the expiration of which time a new visitor was ushered into the parlor—evidently a man of Italian blood, judging by his swarthy skin, his peculiar cast of features, and his glittering black eyes.

His hair was long, a heavy black mustache adorned his lip, and his face habitually wore a sinister expression.

His attire was decidedly slouchy.

Taken as a whole, he was a dangerous-looking fellow, for he had a form like a Hercules.

"Ah! Pizot, is that you?" Agatha said, cordially. "Come in, and sit down. It's some time since I last saw you. How's business?"

"Business is very bad!" was the response, in good English, as the Italian took a seat. "How is business with you, Mr. Agatha?"

"Oh! about as usual, making allowances, of course, for the dull times."

"You sent for me. I take it you want some work done. I always do good work for you, eh?—and if you can give me a lift, it will come in very handy."

"Yes, Pizot, whenever I have employed you, you have always served me well. I have a job for you now, providing your scruples are not in the way."

Pizot smiled significantly, and showed his two rows of pearly teeth.

"Scruples never made a man rich yet," he said.

"Quite right, and sensible!" Agatha agreed.

"I know I'd never have succeeded as well as I have, if I had been over-scrupulous. But that's neither here nor there. You ought to be pretty well acquainted with the tough characters on the East side by this time; you've been in New York long enough?"

"I know 'em all!" Pizot nodded. "I can find any of 'em, when they're wanted."

"You ought to turn detective, then."

The Italian shrugged his shoulders.

"No good!" he said. "The police do not like Angelo Pizot."

"Do you know a character that goes by the name of Jim Marble?"

Pizot's brow darkened into a scowl.

"Yes, I know him," he said, grimly. "He is the worst bum on the East side."

"You evidently bear him no good-will?"

"Not very much. He cheated me out of what money I had at cards one night, and I promised him to get even with him some time."

"Well, your chance has come at last. I want that man Marble put out of the way. I don't care a fig how it is done as long as my name is never mentioned in connection with the affair. Understand?"

"Perfectly. I can fix it so that no trace of the job will ever be secured. You see, Marble 'most always goes home drunk, when he can get hold of money enough to get drunk on. On his way home, he picks his way along the waterfront, and stops into such gin-mills as he can squeeze a free drink out of. Then, besides, it's safer along there than to go staggering up any of the main streets, where a cop is liable to snatch ye up, and run ye in."

"I've seen Marble, many a night, staggering along, when he'd take a notion to walk out on a dock, and come within an ace of falling into the river."

"Well, he'll be sure to be full to-night."

"Why so?"

"Because he's got quite a boodle with him, I have learned."

"Then that settles it. Watch the police news to-morrow."

"Very well. See that you make no botch of the job."

"Did you ever know me to do a thing like that?"

"No, I can't say as I did. I hope you will be successful this time."

"I'll guarantee to do that. But now there's nother thing to consider. How much is the pay?"

"Oh, we will make that all right after the job is done, Pizot."

"No, we won't!" Pizot declared, with emphasis. "Cash first, and then the job."

"Well, how much do you want?"

"Five hundred dollars."

The scheming merchant whistled.

"You must think I'm a National Bank!" he grumbled.

"If you're not, you've got money enough to start one," Pizot smiled. "The job's cheap at my offer, and not a cent less will do it."

"Oh, well, I suppose I'll have to yield the point. But I shall expect you to do the job, without fail."

"If I fail I'll give you back the money," Pizot declared.

"Very well. You'll have to wheel my chair over to my safe yonder, as, owing to my gout, I can only walk with great pain."

Accordingly, Pizot took hold of the chair, which was mounted on castors, and wheeled the merchant to a small iron safe which stood in one corner.

Agatha opened the safe, and taking out the required amount of money gave it to the Italian.

He then closed the safe and was wheeled back to his former position.

"You can depend on it, Jim Marble is a dead man," Pizot said, as he stored the money away in one of his pockets, "and I'm much obliged to you for giving me the job. I'll go now and locate my man and keep an eye on him till the right moment arrives, then—"

And, with a significant shrug of his shoulders, the swarthy villain left the room, and Aaron Agatha settled himself back in his chair in a comfortable position.

"Ah! I think I can feel easier now," he muttered, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

"Of course it's a good deal of money to pay out—a good deal of hard-earned money; but then, what's that as compared with being safe? And I should never be safe while Jim Agatha lived! Sooner or later he would have betrayed me, and the devil would have been to pay."

"But now I may consider myself safe. Pizot is as true as steel, and will not fail to do his duty. He knows I pay well, and has good sense enough not to trifle with any job he undertakes for me."

"Yes; with Jim Agatha out of the way, I have nothing to fear. The girl knows nothing, unless Jim has told her, and I don't believe he has. I think everything is lovely, and the goose hangs high!"

That night, the same as the day had been, was wet and chill, and a piercing wind blew through the city between the two rivers with a vengeance that would chill a pedestrian to the bone.

In one of the lowest, foulest-smelling grogeries near the East River a party of hard-looking citizens were seated at a round table playing cards and drinking bad liquor.

Behind a battered bar presided a burly, bleary-eyed Hibernian, who looked capable of handling a dozen men at a time.

Near the table, and overlooking the game, was Jim Agatha, who, to judge from his appearance, was perfectly sober.

Near a stove stood a full-bearded sailor, in his seaman's outfit, who, to judge by an occasional lurch he made, had not yet got over his sea-legs.

"Come! come! Marble," spoke up one of the men at the table, "why don't you either treat or sit down and play a hand?"

"Yes. Don't stand there gaupin' on, ef ye can't do somethin'."

"If I'm intruding I will retire!" Agatha replied coolly, and he turned away from the table.

"Listen to the airs of the dilapidated bum," cried another of the players. "One would think as 'ow he was the Lord Mayor o' London, or some other bloomin' big gun."

"Look here!" said the bartender, coming from behind the bar. "You've bin hangin' 'round here all the avenin' an' niver bought a drink. So yez had better take a skip."

"Very well; I'll go!" Marble replied, loftily, and he walked out of the place with the haughty carriage of a king.

This was something that caused the *habitués* of the place to stare, for it was the first time the man had left the place in years, without staggering.

But, Aaron Agatha's brother was not drunk to-night.

In his pocket, intact, with the exception of about a dollar, was the money he had received that day.

And lucky that he wasn't drunk, for, stealing along behind him, as stealthily as a cat, was the Italian villain who had been hired to take his life—Angelo Pizot—in his clever disguise of a sailor.

"Yes, I'm done with rum!" Agatha soliloquized, as he picked his way through the darkness. "I've made a wreck of myself, and now it's time for me to stop and brace up, and be a man."

"With this money I can buy me some little business stand of some sort, and make an honorable living. And that is what I will do. But, while I'm looking up a place, I dare not keep this money about me. No, I'll give it to Molly. She will keep it safe. And what a surprise it will be to her, to see me come home sober!"

Ha!

He hears stealthy footsteps behind him.

But, is apparently not surprised, for a cocked revolver is in his hand as he suddenly wheels around.

And just in time.

He stands face to face with Angelo Pizot, who holds a gleaming dagger upraised in his hand.

In an instant Agatha had him covered with the revolver.

"Down on your knees, Angelo Pizot!" he cried, sternly. "Down, I say, or I'll blow your brains out!"

Pizot was terror-stricken at the unexpected turn affairs had taken, and obeyed the order.

"Now, then, we are all alone here, and I can kill you, and escape, without discovery!" continued Agatha, fiercely, "so your only hope of saving your miserable life is by making a clear breast of it. I know you did not attempt to assassinate me on your own hook. You're too big a coward for that. Some money object is at the back of it. Now tell me who hired you to kill me, or by the eternal, I'll spatter your brains all over the sidewalk. I mean business!"

"It was Aaron Agatha!" whined Pizot.

"I thought so!" Jim Agatha said. "Now, you cur, arise, and get out of this lively, before I put a bullet through you."

Pizot obeyed, in an extraordinarily lively manner, and Jim Agatha continued on his way homeward.

"Aaron Agatha, look out for me!" he would mutter every few steps—"Aaron Agatha, look out for me!"

CHAPTER IX.

SOL STRIKES A JOB.

WHEN Sol Sharpe left the hotel, in truth he had no clear idea of what he was going to do next.

So many important events had occurred within forty-eight hours that he had scarcely time to think.

So he wandered aimlessly down Broadway, and thence from one street to another, until at length he was surprised to find himself close in the neighborhood of Agatha & Co.'s store.

What strange instinct is it that will oftentimes cause an ex-employee to wander back past his former place of employment, without really having any fixed idea of doing so, when he started forth?

Finding himself so near the door, Sol resolved to saunter past, and see if he could catch a glimpse of the person who had succeeded him.

Just as he arrived in front of the building, a carriage whirled up to the curb and came to a halt.

A man leaned forward and beckoned to Sol, who at once approached.

"Young man," said the party in the carriage, "will you do me the favor to step into the store and tell Mr. Agatha that the doctor wants to see him a moment?"

"Sorry I can't oblige you, sir, but I do not care to enter that store. I will, however, watch your horses for you, if you wish to step into the store," was Sol's answer.

"Thank you! thank you! That will do quite as well. My horse is a little skittish, and I do not like to leave him alone."

"All right, sir," replied Sol. "I will see to him."

The doctor stepped from his carriage and entered Agatha & Co.'s place of business, while Sol Sharpe sent a sharp glance after him.

"That's Doctor Lascar!" he mused, "or else I'm 'way off my base. That's the individual who was looking out of the window, up-town, this very morning."

The doctor quickly returned from his call, and climbed back into his carriage.

"Mr. Agatha is not in his store," he said, pleasantly. "Much obliged to you, sir."

Then he drew the reins and drove off.

"Humph! maybe you won't be so 'much obliged,' when I release the poor woman you've got locked up!" Sol muttered, as he passed on down the street.

He sauntered up Broadway once more until he reached Union Square. There he bought a morning paper, and turning into West Fourteenth street, entered a beer-garden, where he could read the news.

It was always his rule to look over the advertisements carefully, and among the first to now meet his eyes was the following:

"WANTED - A bright, active young man, of respectable appearance, to drive for a doctor. Apply to-day at No. 306 W— street."

"Hello! by the smoke, if that ain't the very house where Lascar hangs out!" Sol declared to himself. "Wants a driver does he? Wonder how I would fill his mad-house lordship's want? If I could get into his domicile for a period, I might make discoveries. It's worth trying, anyhow. Reckon he'll recognize me as the chap who held his horse, but what of that? Maybe he'd hire me all the quicker because I was so accommodating."

Just before noon the detective mounted the marble steps of the doctor's mansion and rung the bell. The summons was answered by a burly negro, who evidently was porter of the establishment, for his attire was in no degree elegant.

"Is the doctor in, sir?" Sol ventured to inquire.

"What d'ye want?" was the gruff interruption, as the negro looked Sol over from head to foot.

"I came in answer to an advertisement for a driver," Sol replied, nothing daunted.

"Wait and I'll see!" said Mr. Blackness, and he closed the door in the detective's face.

"That's cheek!" Sol mused. "Hope I may have a chance to crack that coon over the head, and I'll do it without the least compunction."

The door was speedily re-opened, and the negro said:

"Come in, sah. De doctah will see you. Walk right into the parlor, sah!"

Sol followed, and found himself in the presence of the very man he had served at Agatha & Co.'s store.

The doctor, sitting in an easy-chair, gave Sol a keen scrutiny as he entered.

"Take a seat, sir," he said, motioning to a chair. "You came to answer my advertisement?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is your name?"

"William Burns, sir."

"Do you understand how to drive?"

"Yes, sir."

"By the way, it seems to me I have seen you somewhere?"

"If I am not mistaken, I held your horse at Agatha & Co.'s store this morning."

"Ah! exactly. I see now! Where were you ast employed, William?"

"At Agatha & Co.'s!"

"Indeed! How is it you are not employed there now?"

"Porter business too heavy for a man of my build."

"Ah! I see! Well, perhaps you are right. You do not look any too robust. Well, now, I'll tell you: I want a good, honest, temperate fellow, to drive me around while I am making my professional calls. That is all which will be required of him, as my stableman attends to the horses. Much of my practice is after nightfall, and therefore my driver must be ready at all hours of the night."

"Exactly, sir; I understand."

"Of course you will eat and sleep in the house. I have a wire running from my office to your room. By pulling it, I sound a gong at the head of your bed, that would awaken the dead. I have also a similar contrivance communicating with the stable. Are you familiar with the streets of the city?"

"Perfectly, sir. I can take you direct to any street and number, by the most direct route, on the darkest night."

"Then you are the man I want. Your wages will be forty dollars a month and board. Are you ready to commence duty at once?"

"I am."

"Very well. I'll give you a note to Howell, the stableman, and you can go out and see him. He is a nice sort of fellow, fond of spinning yarns and so forth, and you'll find him agreeable company."

"Very well, sir. By the way, sir, I always like to know the name of the man I am working for."

"Why, certainly. I had forgotten about that. My name is Von Sutt—Doctor Oscar Von Sutt. Here is a note to Howell. I will have Myers show you to the area."

He touched a bell upon the table, and the burly negro almost instantly appeared.

"Myers, show Mr. Burns to the area!" the doctor ordered.

Sol accordingly followed the negro through the long hall to a rear exit, where he was pointed out the stable, a brick structure, that many a person would have felt proud of as a dwelling.

Sol made his way to the stable, and found a genial-looking man of thirty, seated upon a stool, puffing leisurely away at a clay pipe.

"Is this Mr. Howell?" Sol asked.

"This is Pete Howell!" was the reply.

"There's no mister hitched onto my gig."

"Well, here is a note—I suppose of introduction—from Doctor Von Sutt."

Howell took the note, glanced it over, and then put forth his hand.

"Shake!" he said. "I'm glad to know ye, for it's blamed lonesome here, with no one to talk to. So you've hired out to drive, eh?"

"Yes."

"Get a stool there an' sit down, and make yourself to home. Hope you'll stick it out longer than t'other feller did."

"I infer that the other fellow didn't stay long?"

"Well, I guess not. Two days war enough for him, and he packed up his kit and left."

"Why, what was the difficulty?"

"Oh! you'll find out soon enough!" Howell replied, with a suggestive shrug of the shoulders.

"Did the doctor tell you that you were to sleep in the room over the stable with me?"

"No. He said I was to sleep in the house, and that there was a gong in my room by which he could awaken me."

"That settles it!"

"What settles it?"

"Why, two days will do you up and you'll resign."

"What makes you think so?"

"I know so. After you sleep two nights in that room you'll have the horrors so bad that you'll wish you was at the equator."

"Bosh!"

"No bosh about it. Betwixt you and me—but you won't give away what I tell in confidence?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, then, betwixt you an' me, on the quiet, that house is haunted!"

Sol laughed heartily.

"Well, well!" he said, "I didn't think you was so weak-minded as to take any stock in such nonsense as that! Why, there's no such a thing as ghosts."

"Maybe there ain't such a thing as ghosts that stalk about in white drapery, but there's such a thing as a place being haunted. Now, I'll tell you. I've been here two months, and in that time the doctor has hired thirteen different drivers, and the longest any one of them has stayed was a week. They were brave enough to start in with, but after two or three nights in the room you're going to have, they wilted and quit!"

"What is it that frightened them?"

"Why, in the dead hours of night when all was quiet, they would hear the most frightful groans and blood-curdling shrieks that you can imagine!"

"Did you ever hear them?"

"No. They are always confined to the house. If only one man had heard them it would be different, but thirteen different ones have heard them, that I know of, and Heaven only knows how many more before I came. If I had the means to carry me home to my family, you wouldn't catch me staying around these premises ten minutes."

"You are some distance from home, then?"

"Yes. My wife and children are in San Francisco. I came East expecting to get some money from my uncle's will, but the lawyers cheated me out of it and I was left strapped in this great city with no means of getting home. So I had to take up with this job at fifteen dollars a month, in order to save up enough money to get me back home. But it's slow work and home looks a good ways off yet!"

Sol Sharpe was silent for a few minutes, but his mind was never busier.

Finally he said:

"If your case is so distressing as this, Howell, perhaps I can help you. How would you like to make two hundred dollars?"

"That depends on the nature of the work to

be done. I am an honorable man, even though now down at the heel!"

"I've not a doubt of it. I can see it in your face. But the job I have in view is attended by nothing but strict honor as well as by mercy."

"Then I'm your man."

"But you are a total stranger to me; can I trust you with a most important secret?"

"With the greatest confidence. Here is my hand, and I swear to betray nothing that is told me, if it is of an honorable nature."

"Very well. I will believe and trust you. Look! do you see this?"

And pulling back the lapel of his vest Sol exposed his detective's badge.

Howell stared and uttered a whistle of surprise.

"You're a detective, eh?"

"Exactly! and, accordingly, you must know I am here for a purpose. The two hundred dollars I offered you is to get you to assist me in a very delicate piece of work. Whether we win or fail, the money shall be yours to-morrow. So that, being the possessor of that amount, I don't suppose you will care whether you work for Von Sutt or not."

"Certainly not. When I get that amount, you will see me make a bee-line for 'Frisco."

"Very well. I'll guarantee it, if you give me your assistance."

"Then it is a bargain."

"Correct. Now, I will proceed to astonish you. All these groans and shrieks that have astonished previous employees of Doctor Von Sutt, alias Doctor Lascar, were not unearthly, but human."

"Eh?"

"Just as I tell you. For sixteen long years there has been shut up in some room of that house, probably on the fourth floor, a woman—the wife of one of New York's most prominent business men!"

"Good God!"

"This woman has been held a prisoner there, being told she was insane, when she is as sane as either you or I. Of course, Von Sutt has been well paid for keeping her. It was only recently that she could get communication with the outer world by thrusting a note through her window. I came into possession of that note, and, as a result, have traced out one of the most diabolical pieces of villainy that ever shocked a community. And I am here to rescue that foully-wronged woman. Are you with me?"

"To the heart's core!" Howell replied.

"Very well. I think we can effect the rescue to-night. How many sleep in the house over night?"

"Only the doctor and his driver, when he has one. You couldn't hire the other servants to stay in the house over night."

"Good! So much the better. Now I'll go and see if I can't get leave to go down-town, so as to perfect my plans, and if I don't make a big haul of suckers to-night, you can call my name Pot-tawattomic."

And with this decision Sol strode toward the house, a sparkle of triumph in his eyes.

That he calculated upon playing a big hand and winning was evident.

CHAPTER X.

A DISCOVERY.

NOTWITHSTANDING the fact that it was in one sense a boldly audacious act, Sol Sharpe entered the house by the rear door, passed through the long hall, and knocked at the parlor door.

"Come in!" the doctor's voice called out, and Sol did so.

The doctor looked both annoyed and surprised, but made no comment.

"You will excuse me, sir, but I wish to inquire if it will make any particular difference to you if I do not go on duty until this evening?" Sol asked, with abject demeanor, as if the physician were some great man and he only a groveling menial.

"Well, I don't know as it does. I am not usually very busy in the afternoon. Why do you wish to wait until evening?"

"Well, you see, sir," Sol went on, with a glance down at his rather shabby attire, "you see, my clothing is not exactly as neat as it might be, and I would like to get a better outfit all through."

"A very commendable desire, my man. Yes, you can have the afternoon off, only be sure and be around by dusk."

"I will, sir. I am very much obliged to you, sir."

"Don't mention it. There is one little matter I want to call your attention to, while I think of it, lest afterward you become alarmed as other of my employés have been."

"In an upper room of my house I have, in a cage, a young lioness, that was made a present to me. She is securely caged, and cannot possibly break out or do any damage."

"Sometimes, however, she will wail and shriek and moan, and in the dead of night particularly, when the cries sound rather dubious to one not knowing whence they originate. So now that you are forewarned, you need not let such manifestations bother you in the least."

"Very well, sir. I am glad you told me," replied Sol, and bowing, he left the room and the house.

"The doctor is a good liar, as well as a black-hearted villain," he muttered, "but I'll nip him to-night, or I ain't Sol Sharpe."

He made his way to the nearest street-cars, and was soon on his way down-town.

When he reached the vicinity of Union Square, he set about hunting up Merry Molly.

Of course it was something like looking for a needle in a haystack, but, as luck would have it, he ran across her before he had searched half an hour.

"You're just the girl I want to see!" Sol exclaimed, shaking her by the hand.

"Am I! Say, looker heer, Sharpy, ye ain't gettin' mashed on me, aire you?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Well, because you see Jemmy MacAnnany, of the Fourth Ward, he's kinder stuck on me, an' his dad's got a contract for street-cleanin', an' Jemmy is a nice feller when he is quiet, but when he gits mad he's a slugger from Slugville, an'—"

"That's enough—that settles it. I'll give the right of way to MacAnnany, and thereby save a doctor's bill, and perhaps a funeral!" laughed Sol.

"Oh, that's all right, Sol—I was only joking," Molly said, looking up at him with beaming eyes. "You know I like you better than any one in all the world. Why shouldn't I when you have always been such a good friend to me?"

And here the newsgirl's voice trembled, and tears filled her eyes.

"Tut, tut, Molly!" Sol said, patting her on the shoulder. "Dry those tears with the sunshine of one of your pretty smiles. I've come to talk business."

"Business?"

"Yes."

"Then fire away, Mr. MacAnnany!"

And once more her face became radiant.

"I want to know where I can find Jim Marble!"

"At home. And oh, Sol! I've got such news to tell you. What do you think? The old man came home early last night, and he wasn't a bit drunk, and he brought five hundred dollars with him, and he swore he'd never drink again, and he is goin' to buy out some little bizness, where he can make a livin' honestly, and he give me the money to put away for him till he can find a place, and he's goin' to stay home to-day to get his nerves steadied up, and—well, I'm so glad!"

"I should think you would be! Now give me your address, as I want to see Marble."

Molly did so, and Sol took it down in his memorandum.

"Now, you go and hang out around the St. Nicholas, as I may want you, after a bit!" Sol directed, then walked rapidly away.

His destination was the home of the Marbles, but a sudden thought entering his head, he first made his way to "Jack's" place, where Farmer Ramsey had been fleeced out of his three thousand dollars.

Entering the saloon, he found Jack and Jerry, the envelope manipulators, the only ones present.

He ordered up the drinks, and after they had been partaken of, Sol tapped Jerry on the shoulder, as he said:

"Step outside a moment. I've got something important to tell you!"

Unsuspecting what was coming, Jerry obeyed.

"We'll saunter along down toward the corner, as I explain," said Sol. "You remember the old hayseed you plucked?"

"I should say so. What of him?"

"He's going to make it hot for you!"

"The deuce you say!"

"Fact. I've been sent after you!"

"You?"

"I! See this!" and Sol showed his badge.

Jerry turned deathly white, and gave a furtive glance around him.

"Oh! you needn't try to escape!" Sol warned, "for you can't do it. You see the policeman on the corner? He's ready to give me instant assistance. Now, then, with prison bars staring

you in the face, we'll talk business. You give me back that money, and I'll let you off. If you refuse, I'll run you in, and it will go hard with you!"

"As true as there is a God in Heaven, I've not got one penny of that money!" Jerry declared, with emphasis.

"Bah! You can't work that racket on me, not for a cent!"

"I'm not trying to work a racket. I'll tell you just how it was, and may I be struck dumb if I ain't tellin' you the truth. After Jim had run the old man off up-town, he come back to Jack's and swore black and blue that if I didn't give him all the money, he'd run me in on an old charge that's ag'in me, and that he'd have Jack's place pulled, in the bargain. We tried to argue with him, but it wasn't no use, an' finally, to save his place, Jack ordered me to give up the boodle, and I did so!"

"I don't believe a word of it. I'll give you two minutes to hand over the cash, or in you go!"

"I tell you I haven't got it!"

"Then come along!"

"Hold on! hold on! Wait a minute. If you'll let up on me, I'll put you onto a burglary that's goin' to come off to-night, so that you can nab Jim, and likely you'll find the money on him."

"Bah! that's taffy!"

"Honest Injun it ain't. I'll tell ye, anyhow, and then if you don't let up on me, you're pretty mean. Jim treated me so dirty, I'd just as leave give him away as not. And you bet it ain't safe for him to come around Jack's place any more."

"Well, fire ahead."

"All right. You see, Jim, somehow or other, has got in thick with Agatha's girl—you've heard of Aaron Agatha, haven't you?—and she's dead stuck on him. So he has worked her into a scheme to burglarize her father's store, whose safe, it seems, carries over a large sum of money each night. The girl has duplicate keys to the store, and also knows how to open the safe. So you see they'll have an easy job of it."

"How did you find this out?"

"Jim, not thinkin' I had any hard feelin's toward him, told me himself, and wanted me to do guard duty outside."

"Will you go with me before the chief of police and tell there what you have told me?" Jerry hesitated.

"I'm afraid they'll take me in, too."

"Pshaw, no. You are not implicated."

"Then go ahead, and I'll do it!"

Within half an hour they were closeted with the chief of police, who listened attentively.

"Let me see, Sharpe," he said, addressing Sol, with more respect than he had ever done before; "you are not on the regular force, are you?"

"No, sir!"

"Well, whenever you want to go on, call on me. If you wish, you can take charge of this case to-night."

"Much obliged to you, sir, but I have another matter to work up."

"Very well. I'll see that the precious pair are nabbed while in the act. Young man, we shall have to detain you until after the arrest is made, when you shall have your liberty."

Jerry looked rather crestfallen when an officer took him in charge, but Sol gave him an encouraging word and he brightened up.

Then Sol took his departure.

CHAPTER XI.

JIM AGATHA'S CONFESSION.

AFTER leaving Police Headquarters, Sol Sharpe made his way direct to the humble apartment of two rooms occupied by the Marbles.

In response to his knock he received an invitation to "Come in," and entered a scantily furnished room, where everything, however, was clean and neat; and he could see numerous little ornaments and fixings that he knew Molly had created for the sake of giving a little homelike cheeriness to the place.

Jim Agatha was sitting near a little cook-stove, reading a morning paper.

He was clean shaven, and his hair was cut and combed, and he looked at least a little better than in the past.

"Take a seat," he said, motioning to a chair.

"Kind o' raw outside."

"Yes, it is," Sol replied, drawing a chair near the stove. "You are Mr. Marble, I s'pose?"

"I am."

"Otherwise Agatha?"

The ex-bummer started.

"How do you know?" he demanded.

"I merely guessed at it because you look very much like Aaron Agatha. Now, however, by your question, I know you are an Agatha."

"Well, what of it if I am? I don't know as it is any of your business!"

"Tut! tut! now. Don't get angry. I didn't come here to quarrel, but to have a chat with you."

"Who aire ye, anyhow?"

"Oh, I presume you've heard of me—heard Molly speak of me. I am Sol Sharpe."

Jim Agatha gazed thoughtfully at the floor, a strange expression coming over his face.

"Yes, I have heard of you," he said, after a moment. "You often befriended the poor girl when I neglected her. Oh, what an accursed wretch I have been!"

"Oh, well, don't borrow trouble of the past when you have good resolutions for the future. Molly is half tickled to death over the prospect of your reformation."

"She is, eh! She's been tellin' you?"

"Oh, yes. We are confidential friends, you know, Molly and I. And it is of her I have come to speak. Mr. Agatha, Molly is not your daughter!"

"Not my daughter, sir?"

And Jim Agatha half-rose from his chair, a fierce gleam in his eye.

"No, not your daughter," Sol declared, coolly. "Sit down, and don't get excited. It's not worth while. True, you have reared Molly from infancy, or, rather, she has reared herself—for I can remember of her being on the street selling papers when she was yet but a little toddle—but she is not your child."

"You appear to know a good deal more about it than I do. Whose child is she, pray?"

"Aaron Agatha, the villain, is her father; her mother's maiden name was Ruth Ramsey."

Jim Agatha leaned forward and gazed at the floor thoughtfully.

"Murder will out. It's a very true saying," he said, slowly.

"Then you acknowledge that I am right?" Sol demanded.

"Yes, you're right, but you have cheated me out of my vengeance!"

"How do you mean?"

"Why, last night Aaron Agatha sent a cussed Italian to kill me, because, I suppose, he was afraid I'd give him away. I meant to give him away after that, but since you're onto the racket, maybe it's just as well."

"Just as well, for if you have a grudge against Aaron Agatha, it will be in some measure satisfied when I tell you that to-day is his last day out of prison!"

"Good! good!" Jim Agatha cried. "Serves the rascal right! While I may have been in a measure a drunken rascal, and not altogether responsible for what I have done, he has been a sober, scheming villain."

"I believe you. Are you his brother?"

"Only by birth!"

This was said with bitterest irony.

"How did you come into possession of Molly?"

"Well, I'll tell you. Do you know 'bout his marriage with Ruth Ramsey?"

"Yes."

"And that he sent for her to come to New York?"

"Yes."

"Well, I remember the night he went over to Jersey City to meet her at the train. My wife was living then, and we expected he'd bring her to our house, but he didn't. He only brought the babe, and asked my wife to take care of it. He said his wife had been badly injured by falling from the train, and he had had to have her taken to the hospital for treatment."

"That was the last we saw of him for several weeks, and when he did finally show up, he wore a mourning band around his hat, and said that his wife had died at the hospital and he had taken her remains home for burial."

"I rather doubted the story, but never expressed my doubts to my wife who died not long afterward. Aaron then offered me fifty dollars a month to bring the child up as my own, and forever keep from everybody the fact that the child was his. I consented, and it is that fifty a month that has since been the curse of my life. Aaron afterward married a rich widow with one child; the widow soon died, and the child is the one he now calls his daughter."

"Do you know that his real wife still lives?"

"I have never doubted it!"

"Do you know that, for sixteen years, she has been shut up in a mad-house, or rather in a doctor's house and pronounced mad?"

"I recently suspected it through the frequent visits to my brother of a certain doctor, who, years ago was indicted for keeping shut up, a person who was not insane."

"His name?"

"Doctor Von Sutt!"

"Exactly! And that is where Ruth Ramsey is now. But, by the gods, I am going to release her to-night, and capture Aaron Agatha and Von Sutt, or never attempt a detective job again. Read that!"

He handed him the papers which Molly had found at 48th street and Third avenue.

Jim Agatha read it over a couple of times, then his lips met together.

"The brute!" he hissed. "I'd like to have a hand on the rope that would lynch him!"

"Here, too," echoed Sol. "Now, Mr. Agatha, I've not much longer to talk, and I'll tell you what I want you to do. Old Farmer Ramsey is in the city, and when he goes back home I want him to take his daughter and grand-daughter with him. He has already seen Molly, and recognized her remarkable resemblance to Ruth, and insists that she is his grand-child. I want you to go to him, tell him just what you have told me, and reunite the two. Then, when I give him back his daughter, the old man's cup of happiness will be full to overflowing."

"What! I lose Molly, when I am just reforming and capable of appreciating her good qualities? Why, it will kill me!"

"Gently, now; gently! I haven't a doubt but what I can arrange it. You see, the old gent will be rather grateful to me for bringing about this reunion, and I presume I can get him to take you along back to the farm, and give you employment. Then you would be near Molly. How would that suit you?"

"Capital! Nothing could suit me better."

"Then, come. Let's be moving, for time is getting short with me."

They left the tenement, and made the best time possible to reach the hotel, for night was not far off, and Sol was getting anxious.

Under no circumstances must his plans fall through, now that everything was working.

When they reached the hotel, Molly was waiting near by, and the trio went direct to Josiah Ramsey's room.

The old gent viewed their arrival with visible emotion.

"Mr. Ramsey," said Sol, "this is Mr. Agatha, brother of Aaron Agatha. He is the man who brought Molly, here, up, from an early age. Mr. Agatha, you may speak for yourself."

"Are you Mr. Ramsey, sir, the father of Ruth Ramsey, who married my brother?" Agatha asked.

"Waal, I allow I am, that!"

"Molly, come here," said Agatha.

Molly drew near, and taking her by the hand, Agatha led her forward.

"Molly," he said, in a choked voice, "I am not your father. Your own father is a scoundrel, who, for sixteen long years, has kept your mother under lock and key. This old gentleman is your grandfather."

The scene that followed beggars description.

The reunion was a most joyous one. There were laughing and crying at the same time, and all hands took part in the rejoicing.

"My boy," said the old farmer, "this more than repays me for the three thousand dollars I lost. But for that, and you, I should never have found my precious grand-child. May God bless you, as I do; and I will see that ye don't go unrewarded."

"And as for you, sir," turning to Jim Agatha, "you have proven yourself a noble man. While it is plain evident that it has cost you a struggle to give up this child, you have come forward and proved yourself a man by doing so, and I thank you. If old Josiah Ramsey can do anything for you, jest name it."

"Allow me to name it!" said Sol Sharpe, stepping forward. "As you say, Mr. Ramsey, it has cost Mr. Agatha a struggle to give up Molly, and it will cause him much sorrow to see her go away. Therefore, I thought that perhaps you might be able to take him back to the farm, and give him some position whereby he could earn a livelihood, and still be where he could see Molly."

"Why, to be sure I can—of course I can, and that is just what I will do, sure's my name is Josiah Ramsey!" the farmer cried, heartily.

"It will be with heartfelt gratitude that I shall accept such a favor," James Agatha said, bowing.

"Oh! gran'paw, I tell you that Solomon

Sharpe is a reg'lar hoss at makin' folks happy, ain't he?" cried Molly enthusiastically.

"You bet he is, wi' two yearlin' colts thrown in, in the bargain!" agreed the old man.

"And Mr. Ramsey and Molly, I hope to add still another drop to your cup of happiness to-night, by restoring to you, respectively, a long-lost daughter and mother. I have not time to spare to explain further now, but here are my directions:

"All three of you are to remain here and hold yourselves in readiness for action. To-night, between ten and eleven, a hack will call for you, and bring you to where I want you. I will then prove to you that Sol Sharpe has won a victory worth winning."

"Very well," assented James Agatha; "we will be in readiness. And, in the mean time, Molly and I will go out and get spruced up a little—some more presentable clothing, at least."

"Yas, an' ef I know beans when the bar'll's full, I'll go right along with you and fut all the bills," Josiah Ramsey announced.

"Very well. Suit yourselves about that," Sol said, "only be sure to be ready by at least ten o'clock. And, Mr. Ramsey, I fear I may need a couple of hundred dollars to insure success to my plans."

"Certainly! certainly you shall have it!" and taking out his wallet, the farmer counted out the desired amount.

"That it is, my boy, and if you want more all you have to do is to squeal."

"That will be quite sufficient," Sol replied.

"I must be going now; so good-by."

And shaking hands, he left them, and once more was upon the street.

Darkness would soon envelop the earth.

He must needs hurry himself!

CHAPTER XII.

A SURPRISED DOCTOR.

His first move was to visit a Bowery pawnshop, and purchase two pairs of revolvers, with necessary cartridges.

He next visited a harness shop, and procured a dozen stout little straps, and with buckles at one end.

Then he took the cars, and started for the residence of Dr. Von Sutt.

On arrival there he went direct to the stable, and gave Howell a pair of the revolvers, retaining a pair for himself, and they loaded them then and there.

"I mean business!" the young detective said, grimly. "I'm going to capture Von Sutt to-night, and release Ruth Ramsey, or there will be some red-hot fun, you can bet!"

"Well, I'm with you, you can bet!" Howell declared, earnestly. "It seems like old times to me to gripe one o' these," with a glance at one of the revolvers. "But, see here. We must understand each other, so as not to make a botch out of the job!"

"Right you be. There must be no half-way work about this matter. What time do we have supper?"

"Pretty soon now."

"We dine in the kitchen, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"How long after supper do the servants leave?"

"As soon as things are cleared away, and put to rights for the night."

"The nigger, too?"

"Yes. He's gone already. All he does is tend the furnace, and answer the bell through the day."

"About how late does Von Sutt sit up nights?"

"Always till ten o'clock, and often till eleven."

"What sort of a man is he—courageous or otherwise?"

"I've heard said he hadn't the pluck of a mouse. I know one day a fellow called, and disputed a bill, and the doctor wouldn't yield the point. Then the chap called Von Sutt all sorts of insulting names, and threatened to mop up the floor with him. Von Sutt got scared, and sent for me to put the fellow out."

"Ha, ha! Did you do it?"

"Well, I should smile if I didn't. I bounced him in great shape."

"Well, I'll tell you my plans. We will wait until about eight o'clock. I suppose he will be in the parlor, reading his paper, about that time?"

"No. Eight o'clock generally finds him in the back parlor, which is used as a laboratory."

"Do you have to enter the front parlor to reach the back one?"

"Yes. There are folding-doors between the two."

"Well, as I said before, we will wait till about eight, and steal into the house, with our boots off, and take him by surprise, threatening to shoot if he makes the least noise. Then we will bind and gag him, and while you stand guard over him, I will go up and release Ruth, and conduct her to some other room. We will then take Von Sutt up to her former prison, and lock him up!"

"Capital! capital!"

"Then, having disposed of his case, we will come down-stairs, and I will write a note to Aaron Agatha. Do you know who he is?"

"Yes."

"And where he lives?"

"Yes. I've been there with messages."

"Good. Well, after I write the message, you are to mount a horse and take it to Agatha, and then return in hot haste. When Agatha arrives, we'll serve him the same as we did Von Sutt. Then my victory will be complete."

Just then the supper-bell rung and there was no further time for conversation.

So Howell and Sol went into the kitchen and tackled the repast, which was by no means the poorest in the world. Cooks generally have a knack of providing for themselves about as well as they do for their employers. And who is to blame them?

After supper Sol and Howell readjusted to the stable, to await the coming of the hour for action. A close watch was kept to see when the servants were all out of the house, and the last one was finally seen to take her departure.

"Now, then, there is nothing in our way to prevent victory!" Sol said, jubilantly. "All we have to do is to wait the coming of eight o'clock!"

And they did wait with all patience, but it seemed as if the longed-for moment came with leaden feet.

Sol gazed at his watch every few minutes, but the hands would not hasten for all that.

At last, however, he put away the timepiece and arose.

"It's time for business," he announced; "so steady your nerves and don't falter."

"Don't you worry about that!" Howell replied. "I never weakened so far as nerve was concerned yet. Hadn't we better take our boots off here at the stable?"

"I don't know but you're right. We will do so."

They accordingly removed their boots in the stable, and then, in their stocking feet, started for the house.

They reached the rear entrance unnoticed, and softly opened the door. All was quiet within.

Then they stole into the hall, the whole length of which was carpeted, so the two men passed along the hall noiselessly.

When they reached the parlor door they paused and listened.

Not a sound came from within.

"He's in the laboratory!" whispered Howell.

Each then drew and cocked a revolver, and softly turning the knob, Sol Sharpe noiselessly opened the door, and they entered the parlor.

Doctor Von Sutt was not there.

Stealthily they advanced and peered into the laboratory.

The doctor was there, busily engaged in putting up some powders, wholly unaware that he had eiders, until Sol Sharpe's stern voice cried out:

"Von Sutt, throw up your hands, and make no outcry or we will shoot you down like a dog!"

The villain saw the two men, and likewise the two gleaming weapons leveled at his heart.

He turned deathly pale.

"What is the meaning of this nonsense?" he gasped.

"You'll likely find out there's not much nonsense about it," Sol replied. "I am Solomon Sharpe, detective, and I have come here to rescue the bitterly-wronged wife of that villain, Aaron Agatha. While we are rescuing her we shall have to make you a prisoner. If you offer resistance or make the least outcry we will shoot you down without hesitation. Do you understand? Your little game is up, and your only chance is to submit to the inevitable and run your chances of getting clear. Howell, keep a bead on him while I bind him, and if he utters an outcry, shoot him down regardless of the after consequences."

"I'll fix him!" Howell replied, grimly.

A torrent of oaths burst from Von Sutt's lips as Sol advanced with a couple of straps he had purchased.

"You hell-bound!" he hissed; "I'll pay you for this!"

And he aimed a blow at Sol's face, which, if

it had hit him, would have knocked him senseless.

But the alert detective ducked neatly, and then, with his handy right, struck the doctor a blow between the eyes that felled him like an ox and wholly deprived him of his senses.

"Bully boy!" cried Howell, coming forward. "That was a victory easy won. Better strap him, before he comes to."

"I'll fix him!" Sol replied. "I nearly broke my fist on his vile head."

Von Sutt was soon securely bound hand and foot, and gagged so that he could make no noise.

He was then left in the laboratory and the doors were closed.

"Now we'll away to the rescue of the prisoner," Sol said. "Things are working in first-class shape, and I am more than pleased. If we have as good success with old Agatha, I shall have my reward."

The first thing was to find a lamp, and after some search they found one and lit it.

Then they went up-stairs, but not until they had secured a bunch of keys from Von Sutt's pocket.

They first explored the second floor.

There was a handsomely-furnished front parlor on this floor, and the gas was lit, for Sol intended to turn it over to the use of the poor prisoner until the proper moment for her to come down-stairs.

Then they ascended to the fourth floor in the rear, where Sol supposed Ruth was confined, and he was not mistaken.

When they reached the door of the rear room they heard low, piteous moans on the inside.

The door was secured on the outside by several iron bars, for the door opened outward, and two padlocks.

While Sol was trying to find a key to fit the locks, Howell removed the bars, and in a few minutes the door was unlocked and opened, and the two men stepped into the cell—for such it practically was.

Upon a cot-bed lay a woman, but she immediately arose when the detectives entered and gazed at them in a dazed sort of way.

She had once been a beautiful person, and still possessed many claims to good looks, although her face was very pale and her cheeks emaciated, but her eyes were bright and intelligent of expression.

She looked far from being an insane woman.

Her hair was as white as driven snow, and her form very slender.

She was attired in a plain black dress, with a ribbon at her throat, and had a far more neat appearance than the men had had reason to expect.

"Who are you?" she demanded, gazing at her visitors with a sort of wistful eagerness.

"We are friends, madam, who have come to your rescue!" Sol replied.

"To my rescue! To my rescue! Oh! my God, it can't be true!"

"Yet it is true. After all your years of incarceration you are once more a free woman, and there is happiness yet in store for you. But come! we will go to the parlor where I will tell you more."

She followed them with careful footsteps, as if she were fearful lest she should fall, and awoken to find that this unexpected freedom was but a mockery and a dream.

When they reached the second floor parlor, Sol gave her an easy-chair, and finding a bottle of wine and glasses on a side-board, he gave her a good draught of the liquor, to give her strength.

"You are very kind, sir," she said, gratefully, "but of course I do not know to whom I am indebted for my release."

"To your own daughter, madam."

"Oh, sir, do not trifle with me! You do not mean to tell me that my daughter still lives?"

"Yes, Mrs. Agatha. She lives, and is one of the best, most loyal-hearted girls in New York, even though she was brought up in the streets. She's a little rough, but she's a diamond that will easily polish."

"Oh! where is she? where is she? I must see her at once!"

"Be patient, dear lady. Within a couple of hours she will be here."

"God be praised! But, go on, and tell me about her. You say she caused my rescue?"

"In one sense, yes. It was she who found the paper you sent adrift from the window. She had some curiosity to know what it meant, and brought it to me. I am a detective; my name is Solomon Sharpe. I became interested, and partly by good luck, and partly by craft, I

worked out the fact that you were imprisoned here, that you were placed here by your husband, that your husband was Aaron Agatha, that Molly, the newsgirl, was your daughter, and so forth, and so forth. In fact, I have fetched things around to such a climax that, ere the night is passed, you will be reunited, not only to your own daughter, but to your jolly old father, Josiah Ramsey, who even now is waiting impatiently for the conveyance to bring him here!"

With a glad cry Ruth sprang from her chair, and threw her arms about the young detective's neck.

"May the love of the Almighty ever be with you!" she said, fervently. "Truly, you are one of Nature's noblemen."

"Not quite so strong as that, I guess. I am sure it has afforded me great pleasure, however, to bring about this denouement."

"Do you know my child?"

"I have known her ever since, when a mere toddler, she first appeared upon the streets selling papers. I always kept an eye on her, and gave her such assistance as I could, and have done so, year by year, until now she is grown up to young womanhood, and has for several years been her own support."

"But one more question! Where is the doctor—that demon doctor?"

"Down-stairs, in his laboratory, bound hand and foot, and gagged. Within the next hour, I expect to have your husband, Aaron Agatha, in the same fix. Now I have some other matters to attend to, so I shall have to ask you to excuse me. You remain here, and nerve yourself to meet those who are dear to you. Be brave and cool, and don't get excited, so that when your father does come, you will be in condition to enjoy the reunion all the more. Help yourself to the wine. It will do you good. As soon as they come, I will bring them up."

"Oh! I will be brave," Mrs. Agatha said, with a tearful smile that belied her words.

Then Sol and Howell bowed their way out of the room, and went down-stairs.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

"We must now send for Agatha!" Sol Sharpe decided, when they reached the parlor below. "He must get here, by all means, before Josiah Ramsey and party arrive. Get your horse ready, and I'll have the note done by that time."

"The horse is all ready, except slipping on a bridle. I am accustomed to riding bareback. However, I guess I will go and get our boots."

By the time he returned with the boots, Sol had the note prepared. He had written it on one of the doctor's letter-heads, and finding some of the doctor's writing on the desk; had succeeded in imitating his chirography quite cleverly.

This is what he wrote:

"MR. AGATHA:—
"DEAR SIR:—Come immediately, gout or no gout. The devil's to pay."
VON SUTT."

"There, you take that to Agatha," Sol said, handing the note to Howell, "and as soon as you have delivered it, hasten back."

Howell took the note and left the house.

After he was gone, Sol entered the laboratory, and took a look at the prisoner.

He was still unconscious, and his respirations were scarcely perceptible.

"Jingol! I hope the fellow ain't going to kick the bucket!" the detective muttered. "If he should, it would be a bad racket on me. If he don't recover consciousness ere long, I'll try to give him an impetus to do so."

Howell returned sooner than the detective expected.

"Well, what answer?"

"He said all right. He will come right away."

"Did you see him yourself?"

"Yes."

"Did he recognize you as belonging here?"

"Yes. I doubt if he would have come but for that."

"Did he ask you any questions?"

"No."

Then Howell added:

"You better let me manage this matter."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, when he comes if you were to go to the door he might smell a rat, and back out."

"Sure enough. You go to the door. What next?"

"You will be concealed in the laboratory. I will have a chair placed for him, with the back

toward the laboratory door. After he is seated you will steal up behind him and envelop his head in a heavy blanket. I will then secure his hands and feet, and then we will gag him."

"All right. So it shall be!"

"Then after he is secured, I'll go out and tell the coachman to go home and return after his Excellency in the morning."

"Capital. Your're a trump, Howell."

"Nothing of the sort. I merely make the proposition because I don't believe Agatha is a man who will scare very easy. We shall have to use more strategy with him than with the other chap."

"Maybe you're right. As long as we get him dead to rights, it don't matter so much how it is done."

"Of course not."

Half an hour passed then the door-bell rung.

Sol Sharpe, equipped with a heavy horse-blanket, which had been made soaking wet so as to deaden sound, hastily secreted himself in the laboratory while Howell went to answer the bell.

Aaron Agatha was at the door, sure enough, and hobbled into the hall upon crutches.

"What the devil's the matter, anyhow?" was the first question he asked.

"I don't know, I'm sure," Howell replied.

"Please come this way and take a seat in the parlor and I'll call the doctor. Allow me to assist you a little. This gout must be a painful thing."

"Guess you'd think so if you had it!" was the gruff reply.

Howell conducted him to the chair that had been placed for him, and when he was seated, took his hat and crutches.

Then, at a signal, Sol Sharpe stole up behind the merchant and clapped the wet blanket over his head and face and drew it tight. Instinctively the victim threw up his hands to tear it away.

It was Howell's chance.

He quickly slipped one of the straps around his two wrists drew them together and buckled it, thus making his hands secure.

His feet were next strapped.

Then the blanket was removed, and before he could get breath to speak a gag was stuffed into his mouth.

The victory was complete!

Sol Sharpe came around from behind the chair and viewed the prisoner with a smile of triumph that must have been torture to the detestable scoundrel.

"How you vas, Mr. Agatha?" Sol saluted.

"Vat you tink about madders, anyhow?"

And then he laughed heartily.

"Oh, I tell you we private detectives are the stuff, Aaron!" he continued. "We're up to all sorts of pranks. How do you think you would like a term in State Prison, at hard labor, eh? Deserve it richly, don't you, you old wife-killer?"

Agatha turned apoplectic with rage, but of course was powerless to speak.

Sol turned to Howell.

"Go dismiss the cab," he said, "and then hunt up some clothesline."

Howell left the house, and approaching the cab, said:

"Mr. Agatha says for you to drive back home, and return for him at nine to-morrow. He has business with the doctor that will detain him all night."

The driver nodded, whipped up his horses and drove away, evidently glad of the opportunity, for a chill November rain was falling.

Howell then re-entered the house, a grin of satisfaction upon his face.

After some rummaging he found a coil of clothesline, and took it to the parlor.

"What are you going to do with it?" he asked of Sol—"lynch the cuss?"

"No, we will bind them both to chairs!" Sol replied, "and place them side by side, and see how they look."

Agatha was first securely bound to the arm-chair in which he was seated, then Von Sutt was dragged from the laboratory, placed in a similar chair, and likewise securely bound.

By this time the doctor regained consciousness.

The detective and his assistant then stood off and viewed their work with satisfaction.

"Nice-lookin' pair of birds, ain't they?" Sol remarked, with a laugh.

"You bet! Their pictures will be given a prominent place in the Rogues' Gallery!" replied Howell.

"Wonder what trades they'll be set to work at in Sing Sing?"

"Dunno. The doctor looks as if he might make a good shoemaker."

"That's so, and Agatha is just the cheese for the bake-shop. His hair is so gray that if any of it should get mixed in with the bread the fact would never be noticed."

These remarks drove the men fairly furious with rage, much to the enjoyment of their captors.

At eleven o'clock, sharp, a vehicle was heard to stop in front of the door.

"That's our friends now," Sol announced. "You remain here on guard duty, Howell, and keep the door shut until I rap," and, departing, the detective closed the door after him.

Sure enough, when he opened the front door, Josiah Ramsey, Molly, and Jim Agatha were ascending the steps.

A great transformation had taken place in two of the party. Molly was arrayed in a really elegant costume, and wore an unbuttoned sealskin jacket and beautiful hat, not to mention kid gloves and a pair of diamond earrings in her ears; while Jim Agatha sported a brand new suit, overcoat, hat, shoes, and everything complete.

He no longer looked the bum of yore, but was the gentleman that thereafter was to be called by his name.

"Well, boy, how is it?" Josiah Ramsey asked, eagerly, as the party entered the hall.

"Come up-stairs and you shall see. Mr. Agatha, you may step into the front parlor here and close the door."

Agatha did as directed, while Sol Sharpe led the way up-stairs and into the room where Ruth was expectantly waiting.

Kind reader—

Probably in the annals of all reunions, none was ever more pathetic and glad some than the one in that house on one of the principal up-town streets of the great metropolis, that bleak, drizzling November night.

Sol had expected Mrs. Agatha would faint, from the excitement of meeting her father and child, but she didn't; she bore up bravely, and the rejoicing of the happy trio more than repaid the detective for all that he had done.

Full an hour was thus happily spent, during which Sol was surrounded by those he had reunited, and lauded with praises and expressions of gratitude, until he fairly grew bewildered.

And Molly kissed him—yes, actually hugged him, and whispered something in his ear that brought roses to his cheek.

When these greetings were over, Sol said:

"If you like, I will now conduct you down-stairs, where the ones who have caused all this suffering are held as prisoners."

Accordingly, they descended to the first floor, and entered the front parlor, where Jim Agatha was patiently waiting. Then all together they advanced into the second parlor. For several minutes there was a painful silence, the wronged ones gazing at the prisoners, and the prisoners returning the stare defiantly.

Sol whispered something to Howell, who went out, but soon returned with a policeman's club.

Sol took this, and advanced to the side of the villainous merchant.

"Aaron Agatha," he said, "I propose to remove the gag from your mouth, but bear this in mind: if you use any profane language, or attempt to make any unnecessary noise, I will take the responsibility upon myself of battering you over the head until you are insensible."

Sol then removed the gag.

"Aaron Agatha," he then continued, "do you recognize the people you see before you?"

"I presume I do," was the cool response.

"You presume you do, eh? Do you recognize yonder lady as the wife whom for sixteen years you have paid Dr. Von Sutt to keep locked up in this house?"

"Well!" gruffly, "what if I do?"

"Do you know what the penalty is for such a crime, Aaron Agatha?"

"No! nor you, either. The court decides such matters."

"The decision in your case will be State's Prison."

"That's none of your business!"

"Are you not ashamed of your wickedness?"

"I don't know whether I am. If I were, it wouldn't do any good!"

"I presume not. I merely wanted to see if there was a spark of shame in you. Have you anything to say to them whom you have so bitterly wronged, before I lock you up?"

"You lock me up?"

"Yes, I lock you up. I have the power to do it. See!" and Sol exposed his badge.

Agatha turned a shade whiter, and bit his lip.

"So, this is your revenge, eh, for being discharged, is it?" he sneered.

"It is not. I haven't taken my discharge into the least consideration. But you haven't answered my question?"

"No! I have nothing to say to them. Put me in jail if you like!"

Sol turned to Mrs. Agatha.

"Have any of you anything to say to the prisoner, before I hand him over to the officers?"

"Wait!" Farmer Ramsey said.

He and his daughter stepped to one side, and entered into a low consultation, while Molly came forward and slipped her arm through Sol's, and stood gazing at Agatha.

"So that's my royal dad, is it?" she said, addressing Sol.

"I suppose it is, Molly."

"The mean old rascal! I allus know'd he was N. G., from the time he tried to cheat me out of what he owed me for papers. He's a high old hen-hawk, to be my father, ain't he? Bah!"

And Molly turned away with an expression of disgust.

Just then Ramsey called to Sol.

There was a consultation of several minutes, when Sol once more approached Agatha.

"Aaron Agatha," he said, "rather than bring public disgrace upon her family, which must ensue, if you were sent to prison, Mrs. Agatha has consented to make terms, if you desire to save yourself."

"What are her terms?"

"Let her speak for herself."

Mrs. Agatha stepped forward.

"My terms, sir," she said, coldly, "are cash, and as follows: You pay over to me the sum of one hundred thousand dollars, for myself, fifty thousand for our child, here, five thousand to your brother, whose life you sought, and five thousand to Detective Sharpe—then, no charge will be made against you. Refuse, and I will have you sent to State's Prison for the longest term the law allows."

"I will take advantage of that offer as soon as the bank opens to-morrow."

"So be it," spoke up Sol. "Until then we shall have to keep you confined. And now, Mrs. Agatha, how about this doctor?"

"Mr. Sharpe, I leave his case to you. If you want to send him to jail, do so. If you want to make terms with him, do so. I have nothing to say in the matter."

"He certainly richly deserves a long prison sentence," Sol declared; "but perhaps he will be willing to make terms."

He then removed the gag from Von Sutt's mouth.

"Now, then, you beastly old villain, what have you to say? Do you want to make terms for your liberty?"

"What will you take to let me go?" was the eager query, "and make no charge against me?"

"I'll take five thousand dollars, and give you a week's time to dispose of your property and leave the city. If you are not gone by the expiration of that time I'll have you arrested."

"Very good, sir. As soon as I am released, I will place the money in your hands."

"There is no hurry till to-morrow," Sol replied.

Howell was then left to guard the prisoners, while the remainder of the party adjourned to the upper parlor.

Of course there was no thought of sleep for the rest of that night, and the party conversed the whole night through.

When Farmer Ramsey announced his intention of starting back for Cattaraugus county as soon as Aaron Agatha made good his agreement, a look of disappointment rested upon Molly's face, and after awhile she called Sol to a distant part of the room.

"Oh, Sol!" she said, "I don't want to go away off there, where I can't see you who have always been so kind to me. I—I—would rather stay here and be simply Molly, the newsgirl, so that I could be near you."

And tears dimmed her pretty eyes.

"Tut! tut!" Sol said, putting his arm around her and drawing her to him; "don't cry. You will feel more at home when you get there, and we will write to each other, and when spring-time comes and 'the robins nest again,' I will come out to see you all."

"But, think of it—being 'way off in the bleak country all this cold winter! Oh! it makes me shiver. I know I sha'n't like it—I know I sha'n't. I shall get so homesick that I'll run away."

Sol tried to pacify her, but found it almost a

hopeless task, and he wondered then if some day would not find her back in New York, which was naturally her home.

The morning papers the next day announced the attempted burglary of Agatha & Co's store, and the arrest of the culprits—Bunco Jim and a female accomplice, Ann Morgan. This latter, of course, was Agnes Agatha! They were tried and sent to prison.

Aaron Agatha was as good as his word. He drew the hundred and sixty thousand dollars from the bank and paid it over, thereby securing his freedom.

The same with Von Sutt, who soon left the city.

When the Ramseys started for Western New York, James Agatha went with them.

There was an affecting scene at the depot between Molly and Sol, and the poor girl clung to the detective so persistently that she had to be fairly torn away from him and put aboard the train.

Josiah Ramsey never recovered his three thousand dollars, but he had recovered two prizes far dearer to him.

When Howell went back to California, he carried with him not only his two hundred dollars, but a substantial purse, the gift of the detective.

The body of Angelo Pizot was found in the East River. Some one had knifed him.

As for Sol Sharpe, although he had made ten thousand dollars out of the job, he was not satisfied. He yearned not so much for money as for fame, and thus resolved to remain in the detective field, and add more laurels to those he had already earned.

THE END.

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